THE MAKING OF...

Pokémon BLACK VERSION

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Pokémon™ WHITE VERSION

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MONSTER IN MY POCKET

THE POKéMON STORY

Opposites Attract

The Making of Pokémon Black & White

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Monster in my Pocket: The Pokémon Story

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Written by Luke Albiges

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Pokémon Movie Reviews

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OPPOSITES

ATTRACT

With total sales of over 200 million units across one of the biggest brands in not just gaming but entertainment on a far broader scale, Nintendo and Game Freak could quite comfortably churn out the same game over and over for the rest of time and still turn a healthy profit. And it's for this reason that *Pokémon Black and White* excite us so, the deceptively complex RPG franchise taking the boldest risks in its history to ensure that the games recreate the sense of discovery, the constant surprises and the sheer magic that made the originals so special. We graciously accept a rare-as-Celebi invite to Game Freak's Tokyo offices to see for ourselves just how Nintendo's pocket monster has evolved

Black and White. Where once stood evocative colours, precious metals and various gemstones for potential players to align themselves with, the fifth generation brings with it the most extreme branding yet. Light and darkness, good and evil, absolutes and nothingness... you're no longer picking a point along a line based on personal preference, but picking an end of the spectrum to represent. And this shift isn't just one of branding. It's indicative of the biggest shake up to the series to date, both in terms of differences between the pair of versions and in terms of changes between game generations. So, while the biggest difference between the two versions might previously have been whether or not you could catch Bellsprout, *Black* and *White* go as far as to offer exclusive areas, battles and characters, as they push the franchise forward and demonstrate just how much more the DS has to offer.

But before we get onto quite how so many of Pokémon's staple mechanics have been improved, built upon and in some cases rebuilt entirely, it's probably best that we tackle the biggest change first. Prior to *Black* and *White*'s additional 156 monsters, the Pokédex stood at an impressive 493 different creatures to catch and raise, many with variants and subspecies to discover. But have you caught them all yet? Because if you haven't, *Black* and *White* are going to make you wait some time before the new games give you access to the old faces.

Ridiculous? Brave? Crazy? Pointless? Having worked so hard to cement Pikachu and friends as household names, Game Freak's decision to use exclusively original monsters for the fifth generation of Pokémon games has been described as many things. Though having discussed the decision with

the team, we're more inclined to lean towards the complimentary. "In creating games that are very similar to one another, they're usually going to look very similar too, so that was the first challenge we faced. We wanted to somehow make it very different to the previous games so we started to think about how to add new elements to the game and convey to the audience how new the experience is," explains Ken Sugimori, art director and designer of the original set of monsters. "We got a mission from Mr Masuda, stating that every Pokémon in this game had to be brand new, so no existing Pokémon appear in the game. This was a huge challenge and, to support it, we also had to create a world that was completely different from the existing games. In the Pokémon world, there are monsters that look like dogs, like horses, like deer... it should be obvious that we always draw inspiration from the animal kingdom when creating new Pokémon. The research we did was to take the designers to the zoo to study different animals."

This sounds like the kind of research we can get behind, and, going through the new monsters that have been added, we have to assume that everyone had ice cream as part of this lovely day out and one of the less switched on designers mistook it for an animal and based a Pokémon on it – Baibanira evolves from a blob into an ice cream cone and culminates as a double-scoop destroyer. Between the tackiness of a newcomer like this, and the host of far more traditional and well-imagined monsters, it's certainly a solid line-up, though we can't help but ask Sugimori – whose skilled pen hand produced all of the official art for the new monsters – about the perils of leaving old friends behind.

"I totally agree; it's a risk. Often I consulted with Mr Masuda about it, as it was his idea to use only new Pokémon and we didn't agree on it initially," he reveals. "But in Japan, we've had great feedback from critics and the audience because it's all fresh. In order to reduce the risk of having only new monsters, the design team would put each individual Pokémon up on the wall so we could see them alongside the originals. There are over 500 Pokémon now, and obviously they're not all created by one person – more than thirty people work on that aspect of the game now and each one of them will have

personal feelings or attachment to specific Pokémon that they created."

It's not as though the decision to big up the new monsters was made hastily, either. *Black* and *White*'s director, the previously mentioned Junichi Masuda, explains a little about the beginnings of the project. "The original concept began about four years ago but it was only myself on planning and seven coders at the beginning of the project," he reveals. "The programmers were researching new functions and elements we could get out of the DS system and I thought that since a lot of people see Pokémon as a game targeted at children, I wanted to open it up to a broader audience. We know there will be players that have never played a Pokémon game before as well as those that have, so we wanted to target both groups equally. In order to do so, we decided to create an all-new set of monsters for these games."

But this in itself did away with some long-standing traditions between versions, not least the introduction of new evolutions and baby versions of existing monsters. We've seen previously underused monsters like Magneton, Togetic and Rhydon offered a new lease on competitive life with powerful evolved forms, had further options for Pokémon like good ol' versatile Eevee, and imagined corporate eyes turning to dollar signs as the hyper-cute likes of Pichu and Igglybuff join the cast, though Sugimori did suggest to us that while it might not have been possible with a brand new cast, further evolutions are still a possibility further down the line.

While a lot of the changes seem to be focused on reaching out to new players, *Black* and *White* can sit with the greats in their ability to open doors at both ends of the spectrum. Competitive battling is big business in the land of Pokémon but in order to ensure that

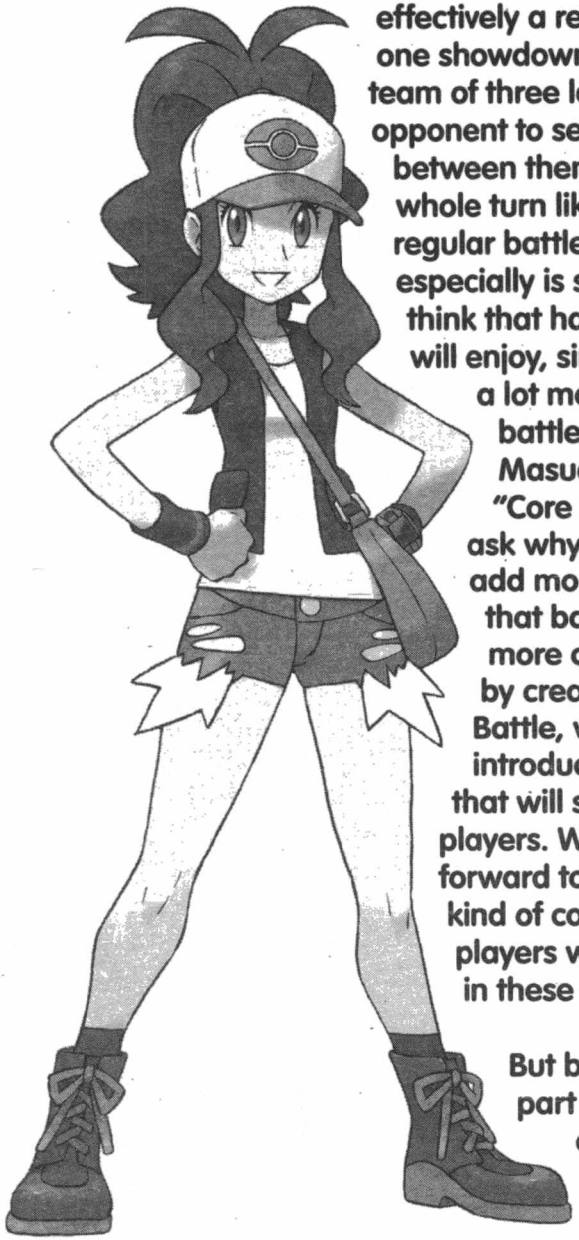
the metagame is kept fresh, this generation sees some pretty major alterations. The first is the downplaying of Stealth Rock, a passive damage attack that almost single-handedly made many Fire, Flying and Bug monsters slip off the battling scene altogether – in a sign of the direction Game Freak wants things to go, there's no TM for the overpowered attack this time, and only a few native monsters will be able to learn it naturally. Something so powerful is clearly tough to work in effectively and fairly, though it's promising indeed that the team is looking to the competitive scene and trying to open it up to a wider range of monsters.

"We've been looking at a lot of tournaments and more and more people seem to be playing on that kind of competitive level. So that's one thing, players training to be better battlers – EV training and raising strong Pokémon," confirms Masuda. "But at the same time there a lot of players that would like to play at that kind of level but when they lose, that's it. That's just not something we can ignore, so we wanted to add features to ensure that even players that have lost can enjoy the game. If we focus too much on the core player, we might lose those beginner players altogether. The balance is really difficult."

Whether due to competitive reasons or to make them more useful in the single-player adventures, pretty much every Pokémon has seen some degree of change to their move pools. So far, so standard – but on top of the moveset tweaks, Game Freak has gone far further than usual in making changes to the attacks themselves.

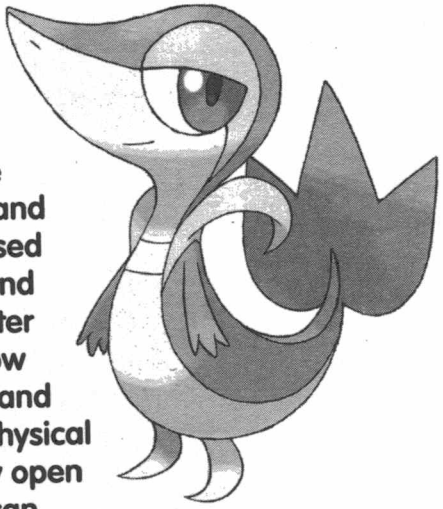
Across the board, there have been power boosts and nerfs to underused or exploited moves respectively, again a move to offer a greater percentage of the cast competitive viability. "When I see a lot of people using the same Pokémon with the same moves, that's when I want to make changes," Masuda tells us. "We want to see more diverse parties and moves. So we'll come up with new Pokémon and moves that can counter the common choices." To this end, many multi-turn attacks like Outrage and Uproar see significant boosts, while multi-hit attacks like Icicle Spear get a basic power boost, which should help many more monsters deal with defensive moves like Substitute a little better. There are also an arsenal of new moves and some useful new abilities and type combinations that should go some way to dealing with the common threats Masuda mentioned, and, even if none of this works out for you, perhaps the lure of a pair of all-new battle types will be enough to get you excited.

Just as *Ruby* and *Sapphire* introduced the idea of teams of two Pokémon battling it out at once, *Black* and *White* take things one louder again with Triple Battles. These are the most complex way to battle yet, a whole new rule set determining which opponents a monster can hit based on its position on the field. In truth, it's not quite as complicated as it sounds. Each Pokémon can target the one directly opposite or those adjacent, effectively only meaning that you can't hit from corner to corner, though this also has the effect of increasing the importance of the central position – only the Pokémon in the middle of your trio will be able to hit all of the opponent's monsters at once with moves like Surf, while they themselves can be targeted by all three rivals. There's also the option to do Rotation Battles,



effectively a regular one-on-one showdown but with your team of three laid bare for your opponent to see and switching between them not taking a whole turn like it does in a regular battle. "Triple Battle especially is something we think that hardcore players will enjoy, since it requires a lot more strategy to battle effectively," Masuda tells us. "Core players always ask why we don't add more types so that battles can be more complex. But by creating the Triple Battle, we hope we've introduced something that will satisfy these players. We're looking forward to seeing what kind of cool strategies players will come up with in these new modes."

But battling is only part of the Pokémon experience, and Game Freak is eager to show



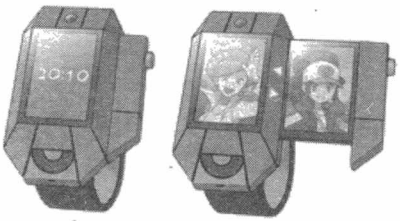
equal evolution in every aspect. Each chapter in the main Pokémon franchise has brought with it innovations to some degree or another – *Gold* and *Silver* gave us changes based on real world time, *Ruby* and *Sapphire* gave each monster an ability that changed how they interacted, *Diamond* and *Pearl* split all moves into Physical and Special types to really open up the game... but what can *Black* and *White* bring to the table?

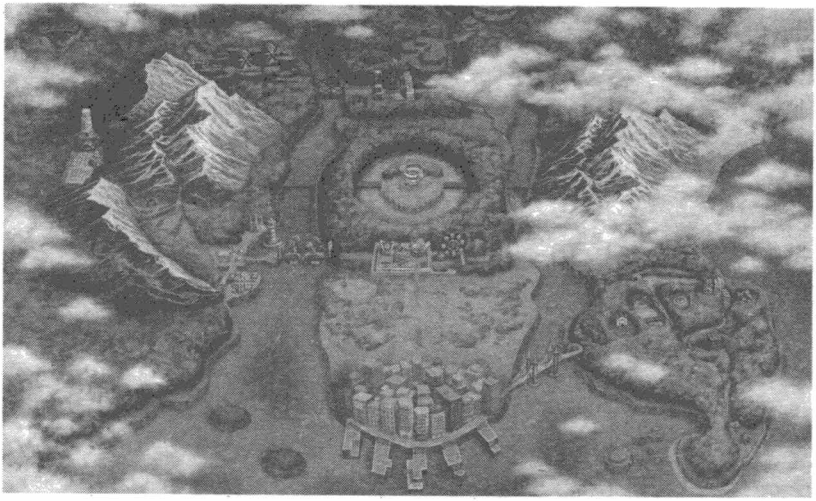
For one thing, the duo build on the real time mechanic with a functional calendar and cycling seasons. Speeding through spring, summer, autumn and winter at the rate of one per month, this adds yet another incentive for continued play and predictably, select monsters only come out to play at certain times of the in-game year – if, for instance, you were after a particularly cold Pokémon (one that looked like an ice cream, perhaps), you'd probably have to wait for a virtual winter to roll around before it poked its (presumably ice cream-like) head out of hiding. But that virtual snowfall will have done a lot more than just sent some monsters into hibernation and brought others out of their homes (or ice cream vans). Heavy snowfall might block certain areas or create slopes that enable seasonal access to others, with each time of year offering similar slight alterations to the world. Don't expect floods to block key routes or impede

story progress but when you venture off the beaten track, *Black* and *White*'s far more organic world means you never know what to expect.

Changes to the world in which the games take place are one thing, but some of the most interesting additions to *Black* and *White* allow instant and/or constant communication with other trainers all around the *real* world. The C-Gear occupies the touch screen and offers no shortage of methods for communicating with other players no matter how close or far away they might be. For long-distance interaction, users can connect to what is being called the Pokémon Global Link and, from here, players can try their skills against the world's best trainers, arrange trades or even mess around with a few more interesting and original features – the Dream World, for instance, enables you to link a monster directly to a bespoke website where you can explore its dreams in an attempt to befriend even more Pokémon (some of which can have unique abilities that they wouldn't usually be able to possess) via a PC, with this seemingly also used as the distribution method for new event Pokémon.

A little closer to home, the C-Gear also has options for both wireless and infrared communication, the former being a DS standard while the latter employs extra tech in each cart for super-fast connection on the fly. "We've taken advantage of IR technology to make it easier for players to communicate with one



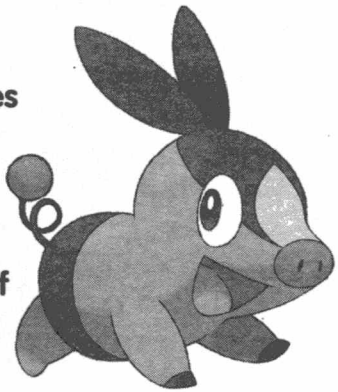


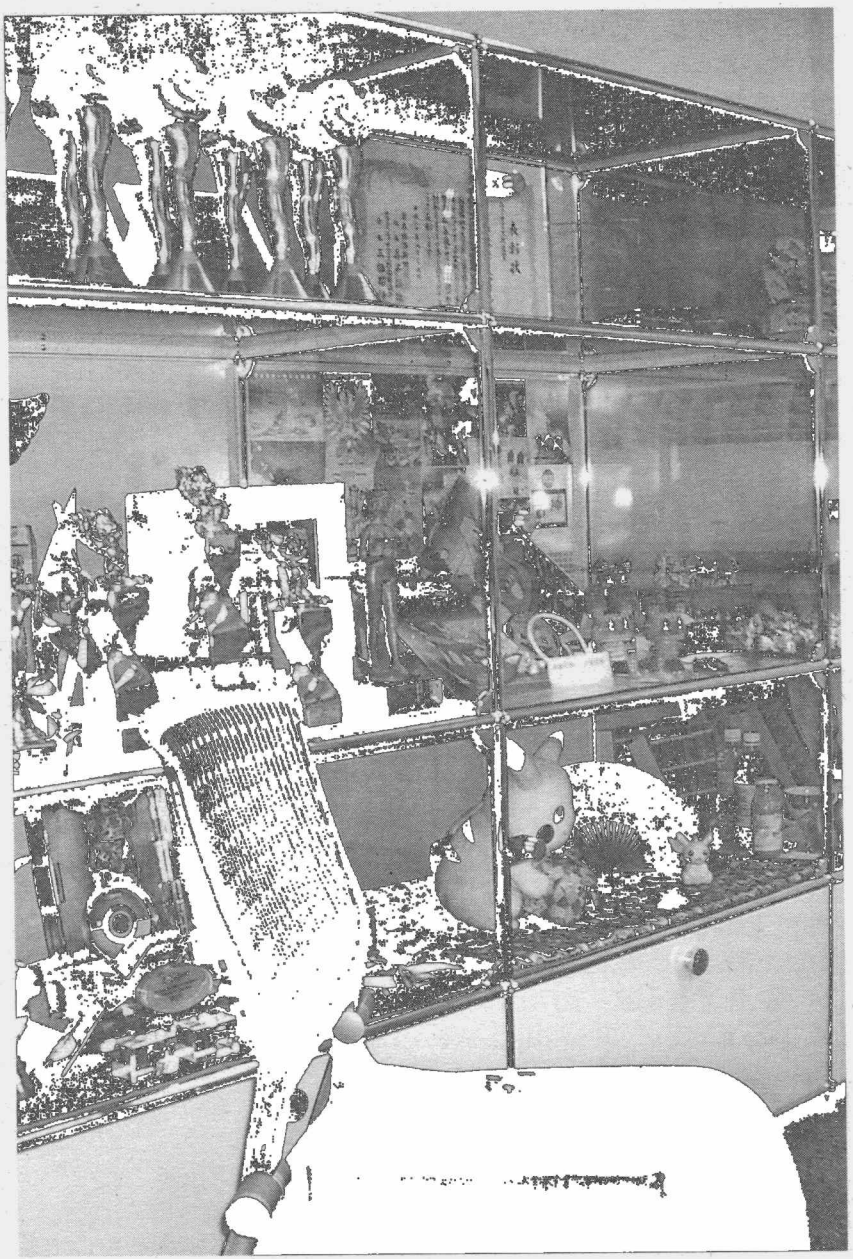
another," says Masuda, explaining how this manner of communication can enable instant on-the-fly trades and battles without the need for menus. "We decided we should add cool new features incorporating the latest technologies so that even older players would see it as cool to play Pokémon." In our experience of connecting *HeartGold* and *SoulSilver* to the Pokéwalker, we have to question the stability of the IR connection for something as complex as a battle, though we'll gladly concede to its ability to trade monsters in a flash as a useful bonus. Good to see that the focus hasn't purely shifted to the online space, at least. "It's not like we're cutting out the local communications where you get together and play – it's just that the communication style is different between older and younger players," reasons Masuda. "Young kids will be more curious and eager to talk about Pokémon and trade with others, whereas older players are more likely to do their trading online. So by improving online integration, we're trying to ensure that older players are able to better enjoy the game."

The wealth of communication options is probably the most impressive showcased by any DS game to date, though the deeper we dig into the ways in which *Black* and *White* communicate, the more we start to see many of the features as some (admittedly handy) foreshadowing of the features touted by the upcoming 3DS. Game Freak is doing software-side what the 3DS hardware enables developers to easily bolt onto any game. Tag mode here lets you share details with others merely by passing them, the Xtransceiver allows for in-game video communication with distant players (or, more curiously, local ones) and even elsewhere, in elements like the height of many of the games' cities, you can't escape the idea that *Black* and *White* might once have been headed to 3DS. And while Game Freak is clearly tight-lipped about what it's up to behind the scenes with Nintendo's new hardware, Masuda at least explains what he sees in the new handheld. "The main feature of 3DS is the communication aspect, so that couldn't be a better

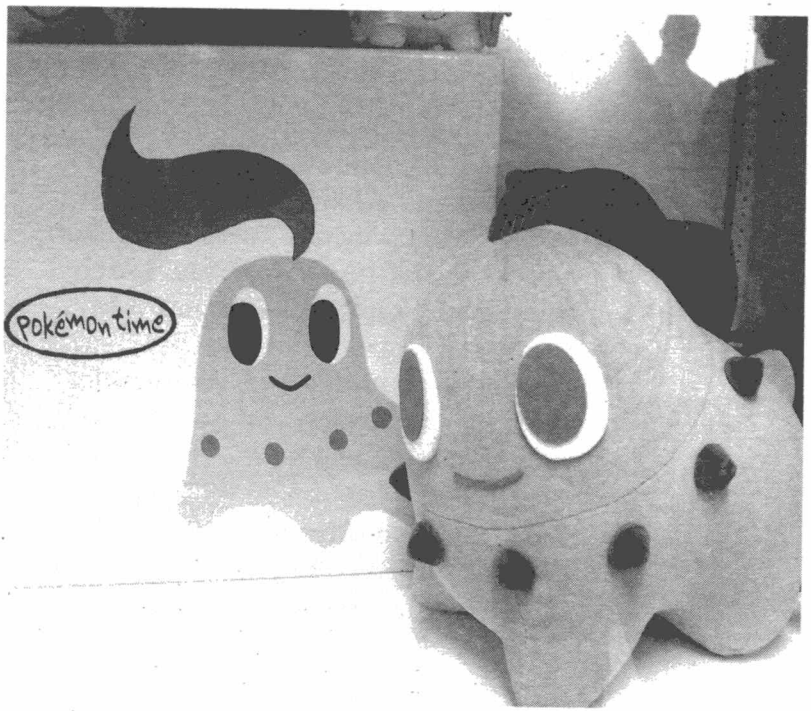
fit," he says. "That's something that we'd certainly like to focus on." Is Game Freak testing the water in order to hit the ground running when it turns its attention to 3DS, or is this just the natural evolution of Pokémon's communicative elements? The answer is unclear, though we'd hazard a guess that it's a combination of the two. "In Japan we have a lot of events where you can go to a venue and play games, so I'd like people to enjoy this new kind of social functionality in *Black* and *White*," Sugimori tells us, bigging up the connectivity once more. "But also, because I have designed so many new characters, I hope players will find a new favourite."

And while some may look over the new faces and mutter something about barrel-scraping, others will be so blinded by love for one of the newcomers that they won't even care what the other 155 look like. In any case, to reach just one creature shy of 650 unique and vastly customizable characters in an RPG is an unprecedented feat, and, as with anything so broad, there are always going to be peaks and troughs. We never fully appreciated the comedy value of Pokémon like Mr Mime and Slowpoke back in the day – and their true worth didn't shine through until they'd been fleshed out by other branches of the franchise – so we're willing to give almost all of the new monsters that haven't won us over yet the benefit of the doubt and the chance to do so in spin-off games, animation and those all-important toys.





Pokémon might be DS's brightest star but, even in the face of stiff competition from another (predominantly) handheld franchise that involves monsters, the team shows no signs of wavering from its goals. "Game Freak always likes to take on new challenges – we believe that the way people play Monster Hunter and Pokémon are two very different things, so it's not like we really look at competitors when making a new game," Masuda boldly states. "We believe Pokémon is very unique and we instead focus on ways to ensure that the player has an experience that feels fresh and original." If nothing else, we won't be wasting our first batch of Pokéballs on Pidgey and Rattata this time around. That's fresh and original enough for us.



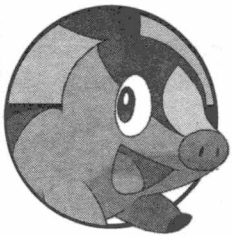
One Down, 648 To Go...

One of the most important choices you have to make on beginning your Pokémon journey is which starting monster to adopt – with the entire world populated by unknown quantities, being able to select a type to start with becomes more crucial than ever. Here are *Black* and *White*'s trio of opening monsters for you to pore over and hopefully decide early who'll be accompanying you as you take your tentative first steps in the Unova region.

Snivy

Type: Grass
Height: 2'00"
Weight: 17.9lbs

Your smug-looking snake-like new friend, Snivy follows in the footsteps of Bulbasaur, Chikorita and the rest in being the only starter that will gain access to self-healing moves. Leech Seed and Mega Drain are learned pretty early, and since the first Gym Leader will counter-pick your starter regardless of which you go for, his first real challenge will be the third Gym and its Bug-type residents. Snivy's final evolution is a majestic pure-Grass serpent that sacrifices a little power for an impressive Speed stat.



Tepig

Type: Fire
Height: 1'08"
Weight: 21.8lbs

Tepig is a cheeky bovine fire starter that will serve hotheaded trainers well. When he evolves, he stands upright and adopts the Fighting type in addition to his Fire type (similar to Torchic's road to becoming Blaziken), later growing into a hulking great boar thing with a focus on attack power at the expense of defensive strength. We're not sure that additional type won't hurt him more than it helps, mind...

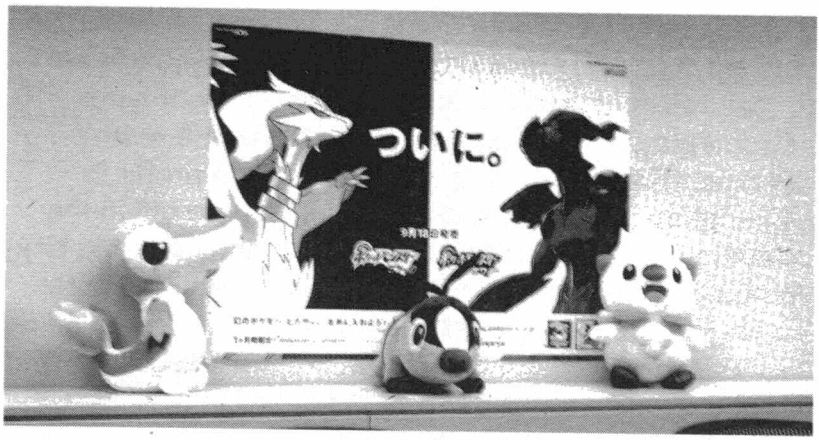
Oshawott

Type: Water
Height: 1'08"
Weight: 13.0lbs

Our personal favourite, Oshawott always seems to look a little miserable and that just endears him to us more. He gets the benefit of learning a surprise Bug move early on to catch out Grass types that might otherwise mess him up, though many of his natural moves tend to work off his Attack rather than his stronger Special Attack stat. He evolves into... well, we're not really sure. But it's spiky. And statistically speaking, it's the most balanced of the three in its final form.

Start Spreadin' The News...

Like each of the main series entries before it, *Black* and *White* will take players to a whole new part of the ever-growing Pokémon world. But what inspired the team to create such a different setting to previous games? "For this new region, I was inspired by New York and in particular Manhattan," Masuda tells us. "I visited when *Diamond* and *Pearl* first launched and I had a chance to wander around. And as I walked the streets, I saw all these different people, festivals, events going on everywhere – people from lots of different places coexisting in one community, which inspired a lot of *Black* and *White*. New York is a very international city and at the same time, you've got children, adults,

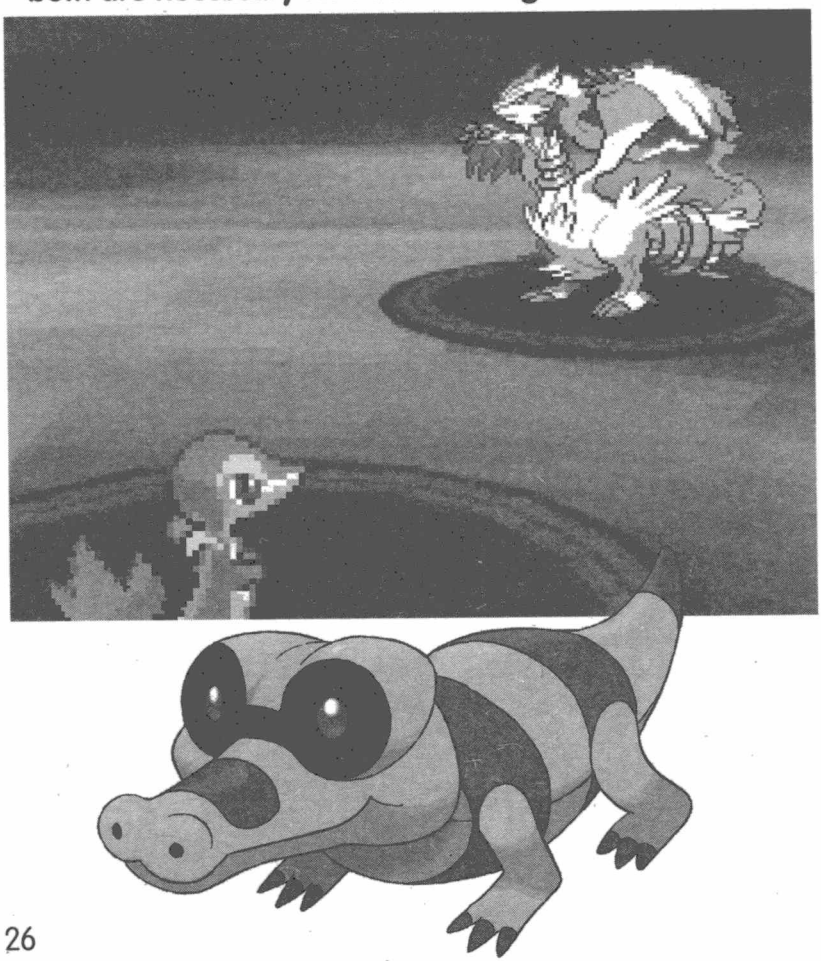


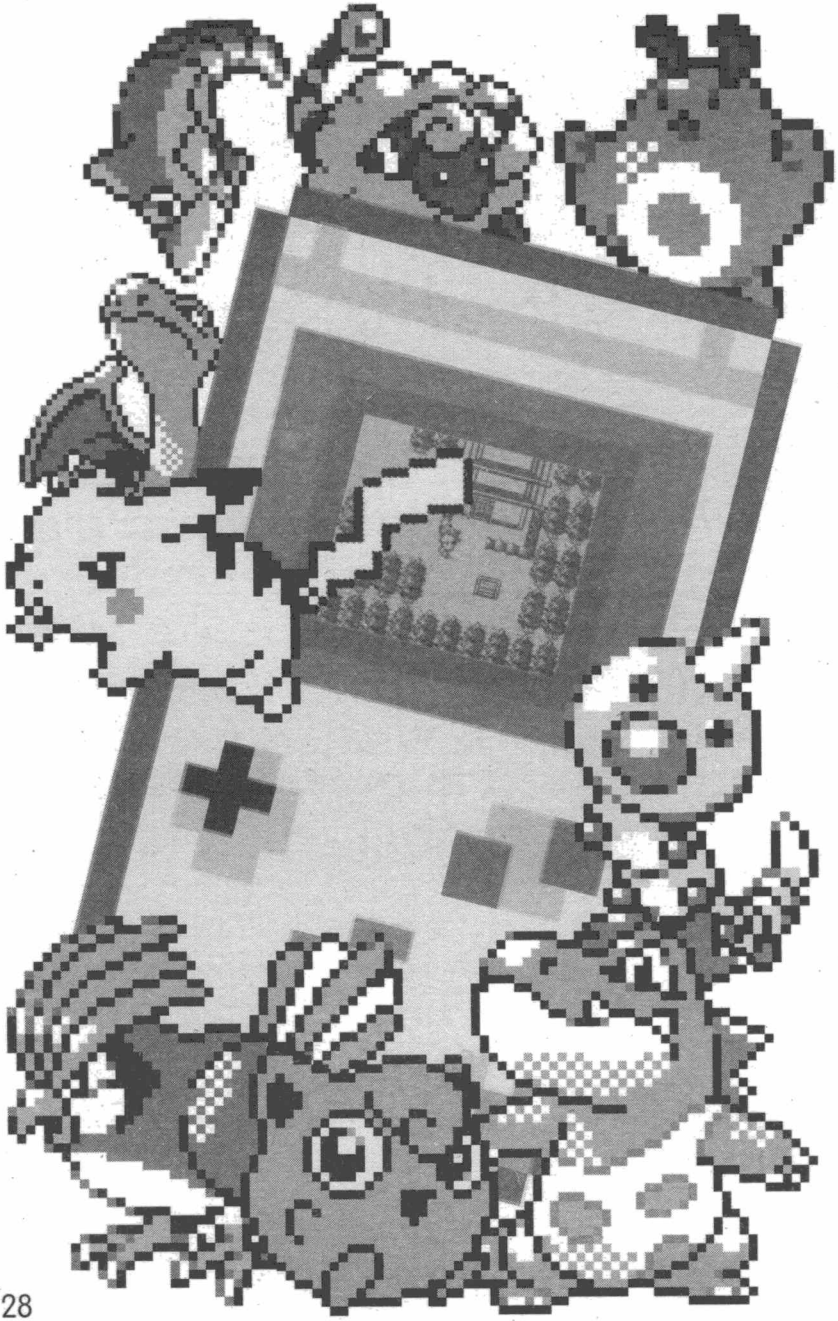
workers, tourists... all these types of people coexisting in one place. Also, I visited the United Nations in New York which is a very unique place. It's in the US, in New York but it brings together people from all over the world, which was very inspiring for me. Pokémon and people... can we create the same kind of borderless community in the Pokémon world? No borders between Pokémon and people – that's the ideal world in my mind. So we tried to create this perfect world in the videogames."

No Grey Area

"We see *Black* and *White* as opposites," Masuda announces. "*Black* stands for urban while *White* has more natural themes." Unlike previous pairs of games, even the same location will differ between *Black* and *White* versions in just the way Masuda describes – *Black* portrays many areas as far more built-up and man-made whereas *White* boasts far more foliage and

a chilled out vibe. Whole areas can change between versions too, with Black City and White Forest exclusive to their relevant versions and offering different types of gameplay for visitors. Masuda explains the team's decision. "If you live in a big city, you might prefer to go camping and enjoy nature, but, if you live out in the countryside, you're more likely to be excited by a big city. We're not really saying that one is better than the other – both are necessary for human beings."

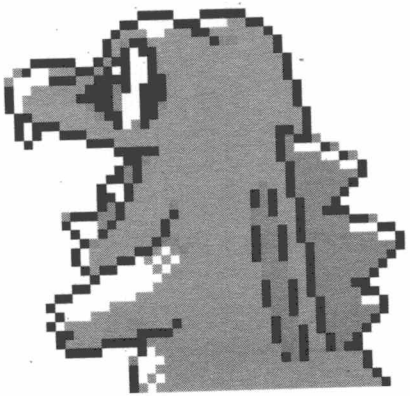


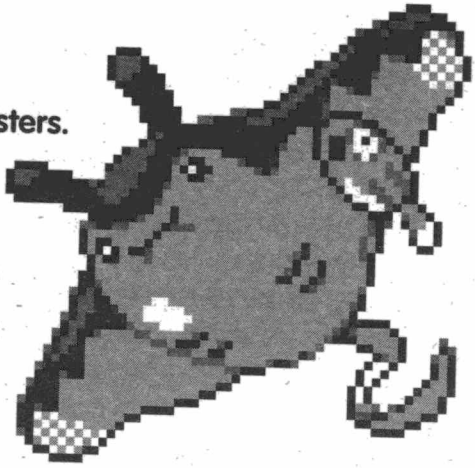


Monster In My Pocket:

The Pokémon Story

From a simple Game Boy acorn grew the mightiest oak in all of gaming, a cross-media sensation on a scale never seen before or even since. We journey east to speak with Game Freak about the birth and evolution of gaming's number one monster.





One game. Two versions. Eight gyms. 151 monsters. However you crunch the numbers, 1996 was the Year of the Monster as Nintendo unleashed two versions of a game called *Pocket Monsters* upon the world for the first time, presumably as unaware as we were that it would go on to become one of the greatest gaming phenomena of all time.

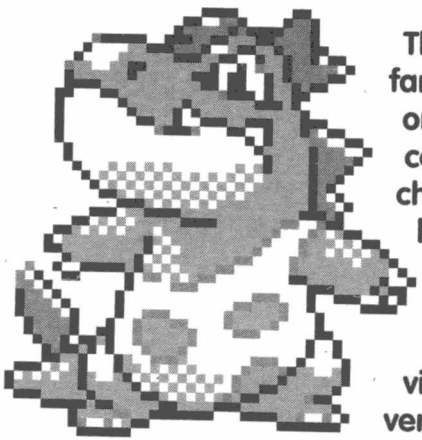
With support from an insanely popular Anime cartoon series, a surprisingly engaging Trading Card Game and more branded merchandise than any game has seen to this day, the Game Boy duo of games would go on to become the best-selling RPGs of all time. But our story doesn't begin there – it starts some 13 years previous to the release of the original monster games.

Game Freak might only have shot to fame when Pokémon became a household name but both firm and name date way back to the eighties. Some may know that the name itself comes from a 'magazine' that some of the founding members of the company used to produce and Pokémon art director Ken Sugimori takes us back in time to the birth of Game Freak as a publication. "As you may know, Mr Tajiri [Satoshi Tajiri] was the founder of Game Freak and I was a friend of his when I was a student. We used to play videogames together and that's how we started this company – Mr Tajiri started a company and I joined. Back in 1983, Mr Tajiri started selling this little booklet for ¥200 (£1.50) and it was sold only in very specialist bookstores," he explains, carefully thumbing through the handful of pages of the very first issue – hand-written on curious pastel-coloured paper, it's a piece of history we feel privileged to see. "Basically, it talked about strategies for arcade games because at the time, there were no home consoles. Only very few people would visit these stores and see the book but I was one of them. As we talked, we became friends and discussed how arcade games were often very similar – if we were developing them, what would we do differently?"

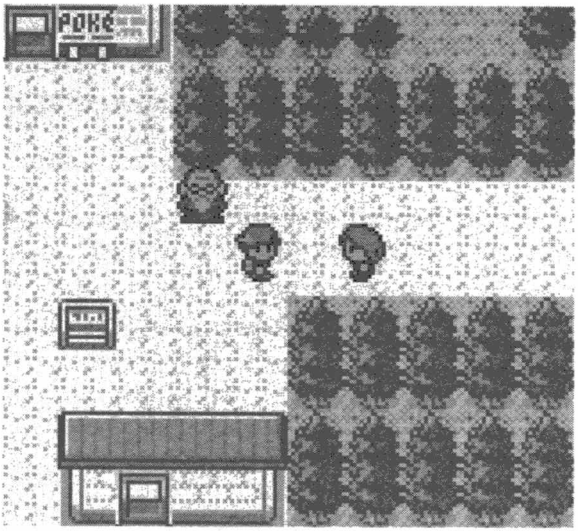
It's a conversation most gamers have had at some point, the 'we could do better' attitude usually a product of seeing poor design choices rather than coding mishaps. While the average gamer wouldn't be able to program even a simple game, just about anyone who knows their games can easily come up with concepts and ideas that might seem like improvements over those made on certain games. But fortunately, despite the

fact that Tajiri and Sugimori only had the ideas and the art side of things down, the help the duo would need to realize their developmental ideas was only a couple of issues away. "When we first started, some of the readers were actually programmers and they had the skills and access to the hardware – that's how we started in producing videogames," Sugimori tells us. "Then Mr Masuda joined and our first game was *Quinty*."

Quinty, or *Mendel Palace* as it was renamed for its western release, was a quirky tile-based action game for the NES and sadly, Game Freak's debut never made it to Europe. In fact, the firm released no less than ten games for various systems before it finally struck gold with *Pocket Monsters* and of them, just one (the rather iffy *Mario & Yoshi* puzzle game for NES and Game Boy) was released in Europe and it was arguably the firm's worst. But from the stylish action of *Pulseman* to the cutesy charm of *Smart Ball*, we can't honestly say that the signs were there that this studio would go on to create some of the most iconic characters of all time.



The concept for *Pokémon* famously came about based on Tajiri's obsession with collecting insects as a child, the visionary creator looking to pass on his love of discovering and cataloguing strange creatures with a videogame based upon that very concept. And the project

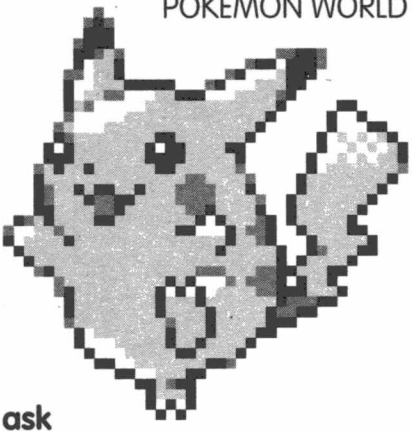


proved to be something of a labour of love. "It took about two years to come up with the 151 Pokémon," Sugimori tells us, though the project itself was apparently in the works for far longer. "It took about six years from the start of the concept to execution. We started the project right after *Quinty* was released and initially we were aiming to have about fifty Pokémon. But every year, the technology improved so while it started at 50, by the end of about the fourth year we realised that we could do about 150 Pokémon. In that sense, I suppose we didn't really have a set target number – it just depended on the technology we had at the time." Technology would define the game far more as development continued, the ability to use link cables and share your monsters apparently a crucial factor in choosing the Game Boy as the platform for the games. And interestingly, it wasn't Game Freak's idea to release the game as two different versions – that marketing bombshell was dropped by one Shigeru Miyamoto when the game was taken in to show to Nintendo, the figurehead defining what Pokémon would be with a single suggestion. This major benefit to a portable platform apparently fuelled Game

Freak's decision to put the concept on Game Boy in the first place, as Masuda explains. "*Pokémon* is all about communication and trading, so in that sense it has to be handheld."

The three year wait for the Japanese success story to reach European shores was all but inevitable, localization on a game so text-heavy only partly to blame as the US version landed almost a year before we saw the games. Some stores went as far as importing the American version to sell on and grab business early but by the time we saw the domestic release, everything was already in place for the launch to be the beginning of a major offensive. And as the backlog of Pokémon material rolled out alongside the game of the moment, this was not just going to be a massive hit but a late boom for Nintendo's handheld near the end of its commercial life, link cables for the first time becoming a must-have accessory.

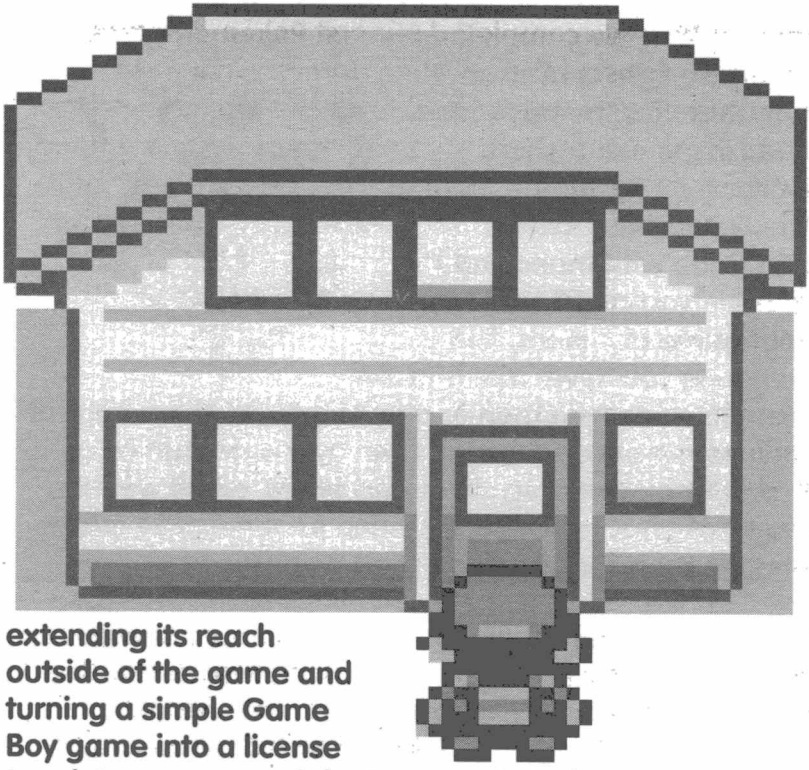
"People say that when you play videogames, you're usually playing on your own," states Masuda. "So we wanted to create an experience where you can play the game but still



play together with friends at the same time and all have fun. That was the basic idea I had in my mind when working on this game. You can battle together and trade with friends and family – you could even take your game to a store, find someone you never met and ask them to trade Pokémon or play together." These central themes remain unchanged even over a decade on as Game Freak works on *Black* and *White*, albeit with the magic of Wi-Fi replacing the need for a bespoke cable and the monster count now well over 600.

Still, back then 151 proved to be the magic number, just enough to seem like an overwhelming task on starting your quest to become a Pokémon master yet still a realistic enough goal for the most devout collectors. It's this large and diverse cast of relatively simple characters that helped propel the franchise to such great heights, offering a degree of freedom and wonder within the games to set them apart from so many other RPGs but at the same time giving Pokémon the chance to grow beyond the confines of a Game Boy cartridge and envelop the world.

Where most series might offer a handful of characters that could feasibly be turned into toys, plushes and action figures, each and every Pokémon has at some point been shrunken down and sold in toy form, the game's demanding slogan 'Gotta Catch 'Em All!'

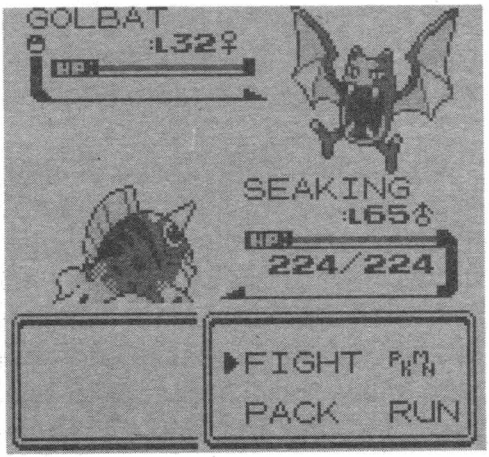


extending its reach outside of the game and turning a simple Game Boy game into a license to print money overnight. But even in its heyday, when you couldn't move for Pikachu's grinning face or Pokémon-branded stuff that ranged from toothbrushes to breakfast cereal, Game Freak never lost sight of the fact that while some people may not realize it, Pokémon is a game series first and foremost.

"Our company is primarily focused on developing videogames," states Junichi Masuda, currently director on the Pokémon series but more involved with the excellent audio side of things back around the time of the series' inception. "Pokémon was founded by Mr Tajiri and the company itself was established based on his

ideas. In 1996 we completed our first Pokémon game. Our basic philosophy in creating games is not just to make sure they're fun for the player but also can make other people happy. So if someone's playing and another is watching, we want both of them to be happy. It's not just a videogame, more a broader form of entertainment in that sense. I believe that Pokémon is a form of entertainment that can bring happiness to people all over the world."

And it has proven itself to be just that, transcending media and generations and bringing together players of all ages in the pursuit of a complete Pokédex. But predictably, such success will always spawn sequels and in a game like Pokémon, there's only one way to make your next game even more appealing – add a bunch of new monsters. For the first proper follow-ups *Gold* and *Silver*, Game Freak would add 100 new monsters and a host of new moves, trainers and options. Sugimori explains the thinking behind why that number wasn't any higher and why the tradition continues in a same way to this day.

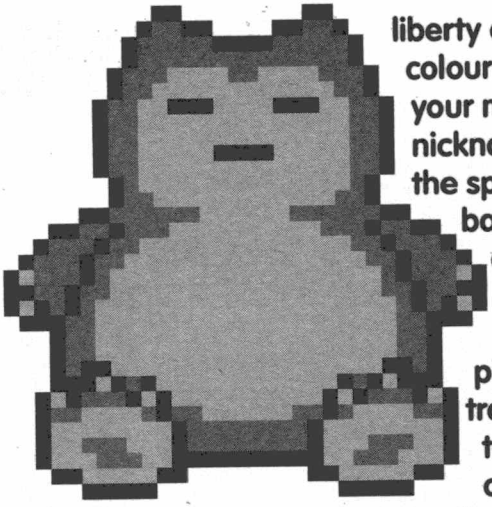


"The reason why there are about 100 Pokémon added per game is not that we can't come up with the ideas, especially when we have new staff – everyone can come up with unique ideas. The number is set by the duration

of the project, plus if you added like 300 or so new monsters, that'd just be too many – we have to think of the balance of battles."

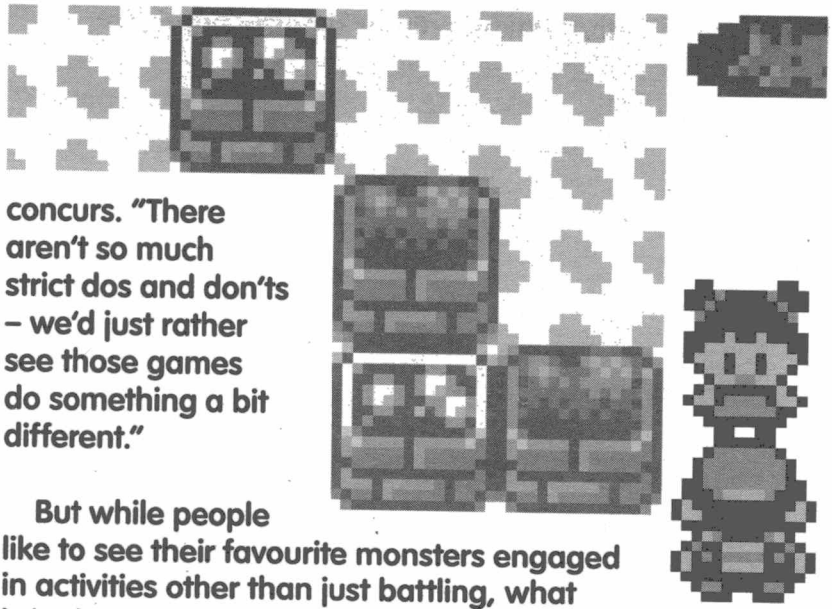
That's something that permeates almost every single aspect of the game's design and *Gold* and *Silver* was unique in that it was the only Pokémon game since the originals to introduce a new type or, more specifically, two. Dark and Steel types were a huge deal when they came into play, offering a solid counter to the powerful Psychic types that ruled the game and a new all-out defensive type respectively, with excellent monsters like Skarmory and Tyranitar emerging thanks to this duo of new fundamental types. It also meant going back to existing monsters and updating them with the relevant typing – Magnemite and Magneton took on the Steel type, for instance – but there's a much bigger issue caused by how these types affected the mechanics and balance of battle. "By adding even one more type, it definitely makes the gameplay more complicated," Sugimori explains. "So when we did that we had to really look into the battle balance – with new moves, there's an almost infinite combination. If we can solve that problem, we can always add more types – it's not impossible."

Ah, battles. While being able to collect a load of monsters is a big part of the game's long term appeal, there's a whole other subculture of trainers who live for the thrill of the fight and it's this that spawned the *Pokémon Stadium* games for Nintendo 64. By bundling the games with a special cart adapter, players were able to see their simple sprite-based friends catapulted into 3D for the first time – the game even took the



liberty of offering mild colour deviations for giving your monsters interesting nicknames. Capturing both the spirit of competitive battling and the connectivity side of the game, *Stadium* was a perfect companion piece for any budding trainer, not least due to the fact that it also offered the ability to play the Game Boy games on the large screen (and at an increased rate, as an unlockable to help speed up the leveling process).

While many haven't been quite so useful or ingenious, the Pokémon universe has been continually fleshed out by such spin-off titles and both Masuda and Sugimori stress the importance of growing the brand in this way. "Rather than support the 'main' games, we see them as supporting the brand," says Sugimori. "You get to see the Pokémon for completely different angles – in a spin-off game we can expand the Pokémon world a little more." It also sounds like Game Freak isn't quite so protective over its creations as a lot of other studios, external developers seemingly offered a degree of freedom as the parent company sits back and enjoys seeing its characters painted in a different light. "We give some advice to the developers. One thing we always emphasise is that it may not always make sense to do the same things we do in the core series," Masuda

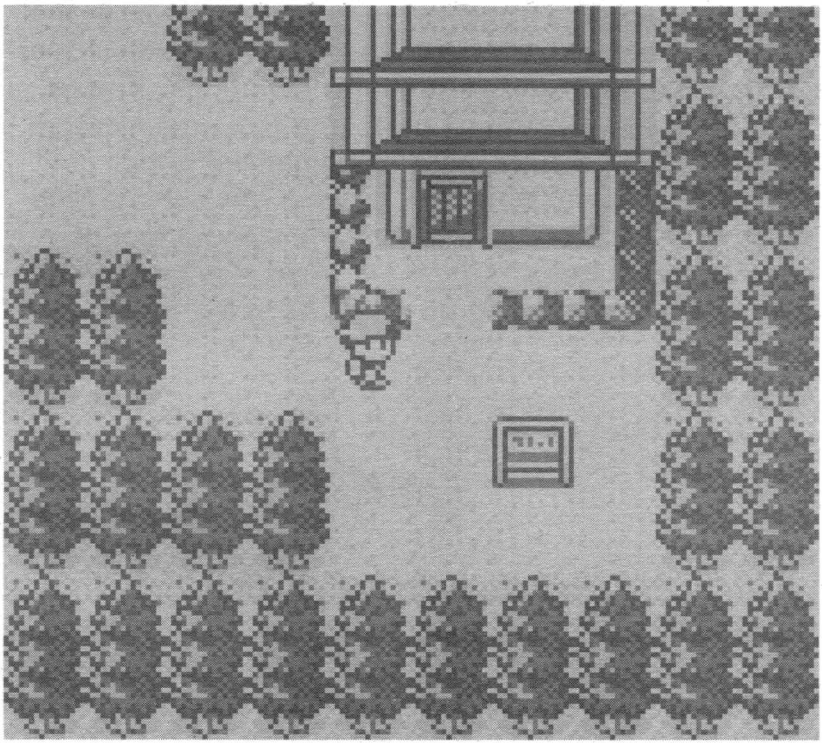


concurs. "There aren't so much strict dos and don'ts – we'd just rather see those games do something a bit different."

But while people like to see their favourite monsters engaged in activities other than just battling, what is it about the series as a whole that keeps players coming back for more? Sugimori steps up to field this one. "At its simplest, it boils down to the fact that it's easy to understand and it has incredible diversity. The characters used today in the TV show or in the movies are based on the ones we create for the games and through its features, its abilities and its shape, you can quite easily get an idea of what kind of Pokémon it is. There's a great mix of cool and cute monsters, making it easy for the audience to pick their own favourite." It's arguably this mix of monsters that see the games appeal to so varied an age group, young players instantly identifying with simple, colourful monsters like Pikachu while older gamers have badass dragons and amusing oddities to keep them entertained.

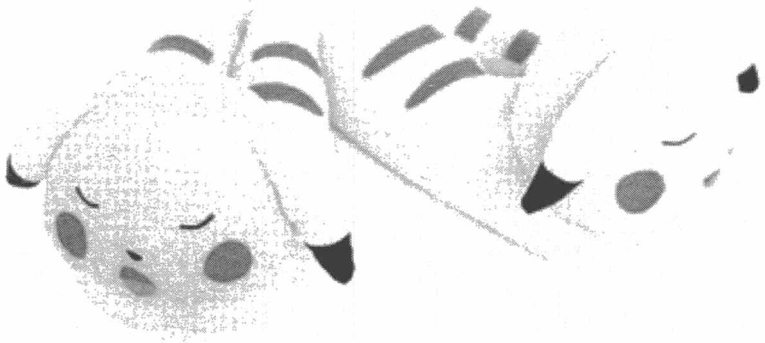
While surrounding the games with cartoons, comics and assorted fluffy merchandise might have given

the impression that Pokémon was a game purely for children, the truth couldn't be further away. While the basics can be picked up by players of more or less any age, the series offers more tactical depth than any other traditional RPG you might care to mention and with a little research, you'll uncover a staggering amount of under-the-hood cleverness that will fly straight over the heads of many. The secrets of EV training, the formulae that determine everything from stat growth to breeding mechanics, the ability to build teams based on countering common threats and dealing with any scenario rather than just putting together six theoretically strong monsters... there's so much to the game that

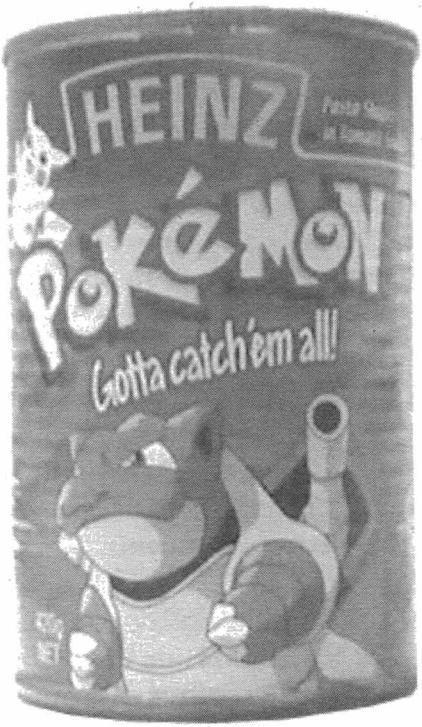


the youngest end of the audience simply wouldn't understand that Pokémon's faux simplicity is perhaps its most ingenious trait. "Generally, people think that Pokémon is a game for children but I believe that's a misunderstanding," says Sugimori though as we've just addressed, it's not an unfair assessment of the game at face value – it's just a failure to look beyond the cutesy characters and the fact that the box recommends a basic level of reading to see the undeniable complexity that lies beneath.

There's another reason why Pokémon is now able to reach out to a far broader audience, too. Those that grew up loving the franchise will now be at least in their twenties, now far better able to extol the hidden virtues of what are evidently great games eloquently. And as gaming continues to grow more and more mainstream and a handheld is no longer a geeky thing to pull out of your bag on a bus or train, anyone can put in a little training at the first sign of downtime without fear of getting dodgy looks from others. We'd also argue that a lot of the negative stigma attached to the franchise



has gone, swept away when Pikachu alarm clocks and Bulbasaur slippers got moved up into the attic en masse, never to be seen again.



So while you might not be able to walk into a supermarket and buy spaghetti in the shape of Pikachu any more don't let that fool you into thinking that the many arms of the Pokémon machine have been severed. No, the card game charges ever onwards (actually growing in popularity in recent years), Japan continues to churn out movies at the rate of one a year and even the merchandise is still around, even if it has been scaled back since its heyday. It's a more structured, streamlined operation than the merch splurge of the late nineties and with good reason – Pokémon hit saturation point in record time and those that weren't obsessed with it after the first few days quickly grew tired of not being able to move for Pikachu. Today, you have to admire the way the business is run and with a dedicated team on the case in the form of The Pokémon Company, each division of the brand is another cog in a machine that runs like clockwork.

"Everything is based on the on-sale dates of the videogames and depending on that, The Pokémon Company will put together a plan as to how to use the different characters," Masuda explains. "There'll be new characters for the TV show and for the TCG too. The challenge there is that you can't change the on-sale date of the games, so this kind of cross-promotion is difficult." But Sugimori explains that by having the various divisions work together, the challenge becomes worth the extra hassle. "As we develop the game, we get the TV, TCG and animation teams in to play it so that they have a better idea of what the world, the characters and the Pokémon are like," he tells us. "We're all creating the characters and the settings together so that they're consistent across movies, games and trading cards."

Ultimately, though, it all comes back to the games. They're the reason we love all things Pokémon and while it might be the Anime interpretation of Jigglypuff (singing people to sleep before drawing on their faces like a drunken teenager) that makes us look especially hard for him in-game or the memory of finally pulling a Base set Charizard card that sees him pip other Fire types to a spot in our team, everything feeds back into the games. And as each new generation of monsters brings with it new play mechanics that force even the brightest trainers to rethink strategies, this is one monster that shows absolutely no sign of being hunted just yet.

Pokémon: A Brief History

1996

■ *Pokémon Red* and *Green* versions released in Japan and the franchise is born.

1997

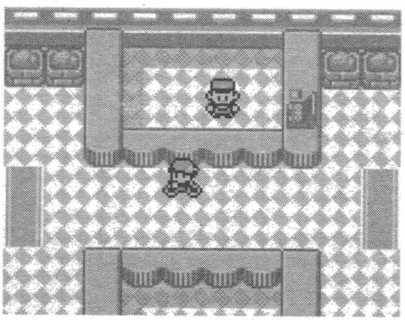
■ An episode of the Pokémon Anime, *Dennō Senshi Porygon*, airs in Japan and nearly 700 are hospitalised after a particularly trippy sequence triggers epileptic seizures.

1999

■ After a three-year gap, *Pokémon Red* and *Blue* versions finally hit European shelves in the Game Boy's twilight. *Pokémon Snap*, arguably the best spin-off game of the lot, lands for Nintendo 64 the same year. The Trading Card Game also arrives and following uproar from religious groups about the immoral nature of the series, a rival card game called Christian Power Cards is released – scoring the attributes of Biblical figures is somehow considered less blasphemous than collecting monsters, apparently.

2000

■ *Pokémon Yellow*, a special third edition of the first gen games based on the Anime, allows players to have Pikachu follow them around. A Game Boy Color adaptation of the trading



card game is also released and we're still calling out for a sequel. Meanwhile, American gamers get to talk to Pikachu in the rather poor *Hey You, Pikachu!* and we amuse ourselves with the criminally underrated *Pokémon Pinball.*

2001

■ ***Pokémon Gold*** **and** ***Silver*** **versions make it to Europe some 18 months after the Japanese launch. Back East, the e-Reader is released and new Pokémon Trading Card Game sets are rolled out with readable strips down one side, unlocking mini-games, art and info when scanned.**

2002

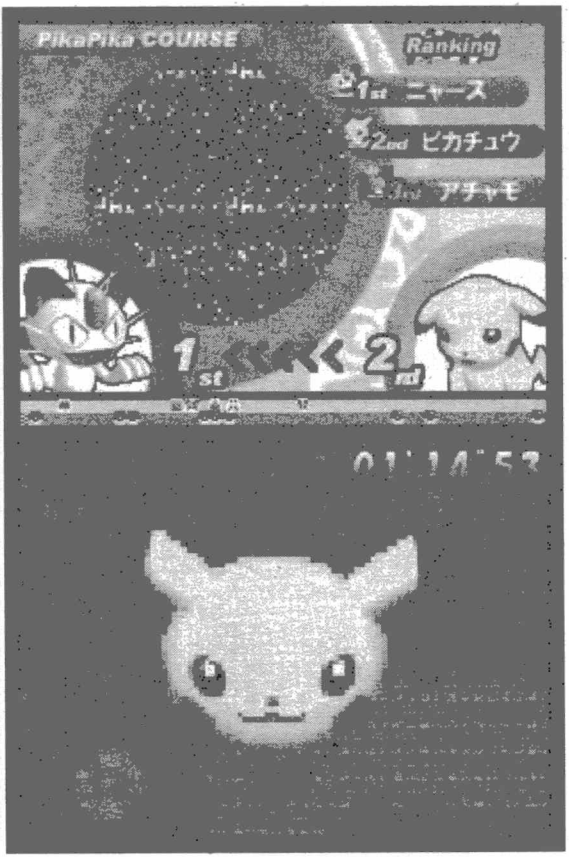
■ **Nintendo's franchise spawns its own console in the *Pokémon Mini.* It remains the smallest console that sports interchangeable carts ever produced and a staggering ten games were made for it.**

2003

■ ***Pokémon Ruby*** **and** ***Sapphire*** **versions propel the franchise onto Game Boy Advance. An updated version of *Pokémon Pinball* joins it later, the new monsters making the already addictive gameplay even more life-consuming.**

2005

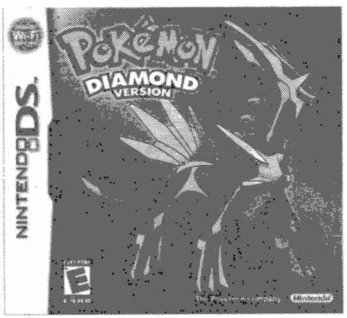
■ **Nintendo DS goes on sale in the UK, the first and**



only console to launch with a Pokémon game. Unfortunately, it's *Pokémon Dash*. On the other side of the world a Pokémon theme park called PokéPark opens in Nagoya. We stay home and play the adventure mode in GameCube title *Pokémon XD: Gale Of Darkness* instead, the closest thing so far to a 'proper' home version.

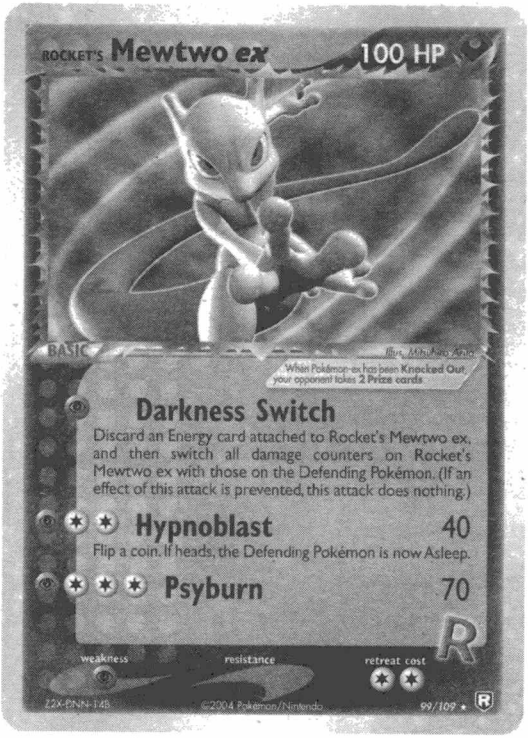
2007

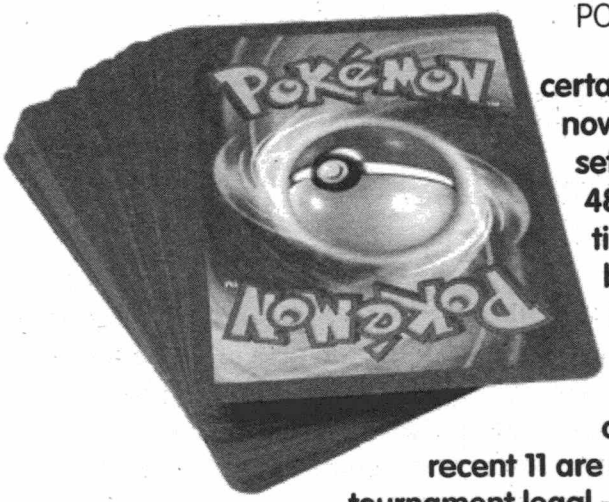
■ *Pokémon Diamond* and *Pearl* released, taking advantage of the wireless functionality of DS.



Of Cards And 'Zards

Perfectly timed and tapping into the same 'you MUST get them all' spirit as the games, the Pokémon Trading Card Game proved phenomenally successful and when the Base set hit, playgrounds the world over became unsafe places to be if you owned a Charizard and were foolish enough to take it to school. Most schools swiftly banned the cards after stories of violence and thefts made it to the sensationalist, headline-hungry press and while you're less likely to be mugged for your rare cards today, the game is perhaps bigger business than ever before. While back in the day the Pokémon TCG was more about collecting than playing, the balance has definitely shifted as the years have gone on. Today, the TCG is a far more mature and complex affair than it once was, cunning strategies available to those that spot the synergy between



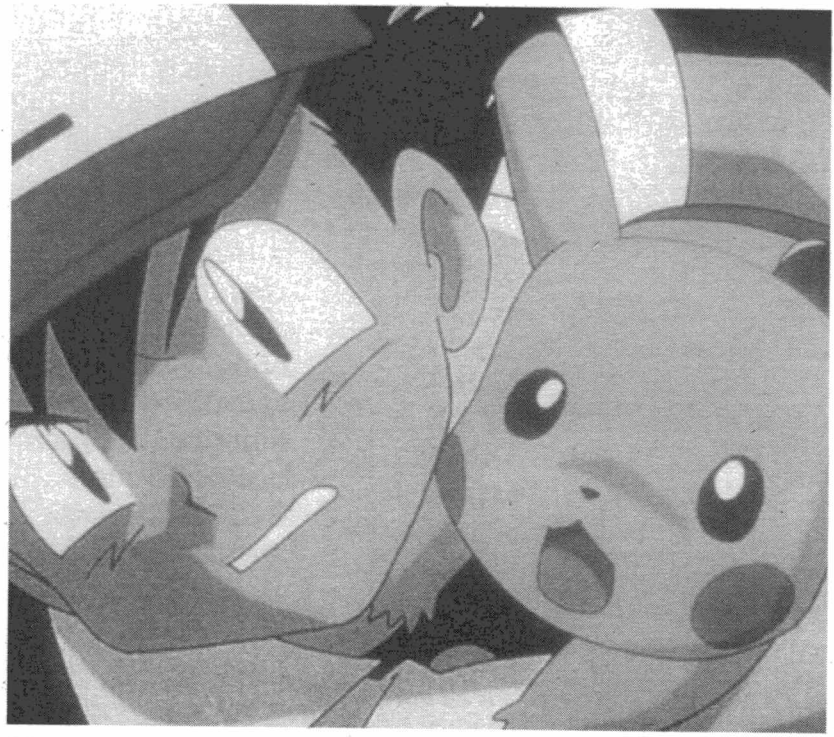


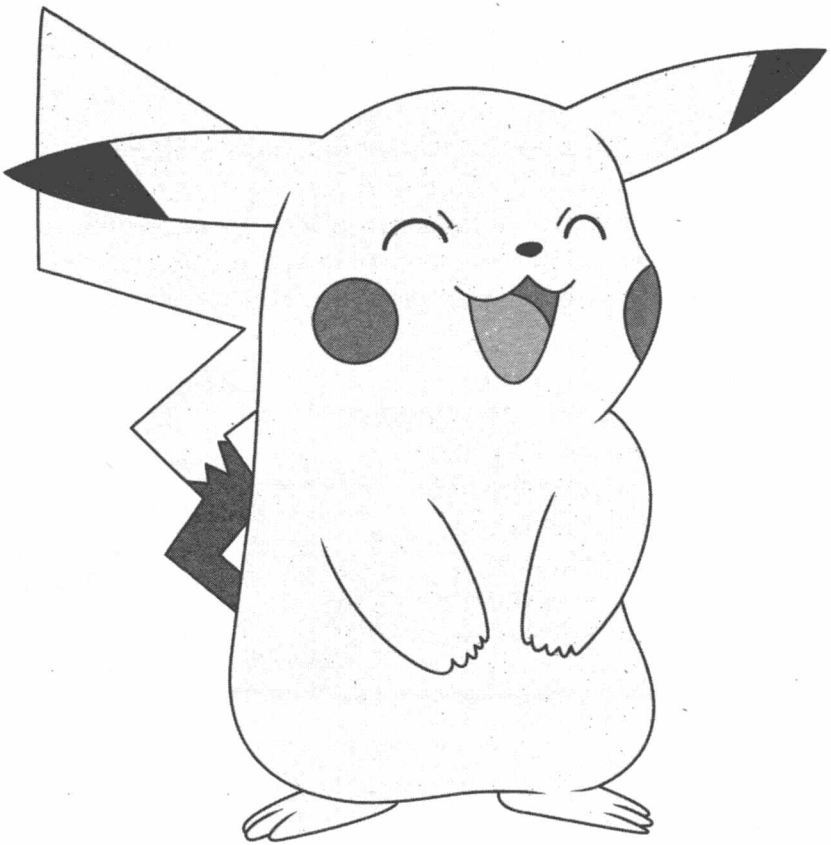
certain The TCG is now up to its 47th set (with the 48th due any time, the last before we get the Black and White cards) though only the most recent 11 are currently tournament legal – old sets are rotated out on a yearly basis to keep the game fresh and exciting. It's a genuinely brilliant little card game for players of all ages – we still play today – and if you love the characters and the strategy of battle or just want to try something a little different (and more accessible than the likes of *Magic The Gathering* and *Yu-Gi-Oh!*), we urge you to shelf prejudice and give it a go.

Pikachu, I (Always) Choose You!

While many shun the Pokémon Anime simply on the grounds of it being a colourful cartoon obviously aimed at kids and others condemn it rather more plausibly for its modest production values (read: rubbish animation), we've always taken far more umbrage with Ash as a trainer.

Even though the show has documented his rise to becoming a supposed master of his trade, he still makes





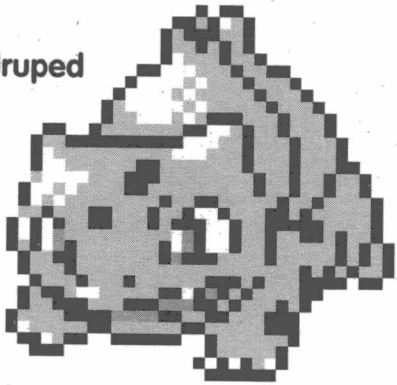
decisions in battle that would get you smashed to bits if you made them in the main game. Most of these errors involve his reluctance to use any monster other than Pikachu at key times, sending the little yellow dude up against Ground types without a care and generally making a mockery of the game's battle system.

We won't say we'd have rather had it 100 per cent accurate but to have the hero make such glaring blunders can't have taught kids much strategy for when they switched their Game Boys back on...

My First Pokémon

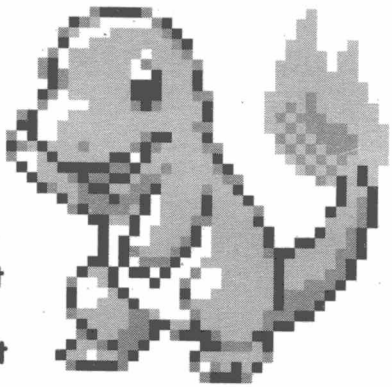
Everybody remembers their first, right? Choosing your starting companion is among the most exciting decision Pokémon offers up, especially when you don't know what they'll evolve into or when, let alone how useful they are. Which did you pick?

Bulbasaur



There's our boy, the odd quadruped shrubbery with a funny voice. Those that side with the only split-type starter (its Grass and Poison combination a mixed blessing) will find life incredibly easy as the game begins, any Grass move ripping through the opening two Gym Leaders' Pokémon. There's also the benefit of Bulbasaur evolving at a quicker rate than the other two, making him the better choice for impatient players too.

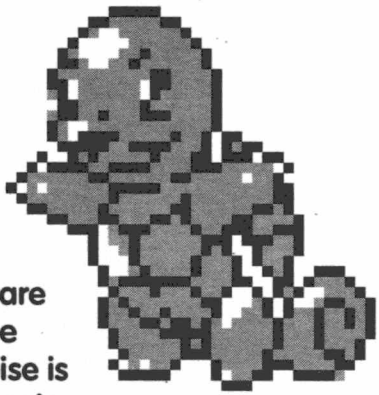
Charmander



The fiery little lizard proved to among the most popular choices (if only since it would eventually become Ultimate Mega-Bad Charizard), odd considering that the Fire type actually makes for the hardest opening – both Brock and Misty's squad have moves that

will snuff out Charmander (and even his evolved form), meaning you'll have to catch some backup monsters if you want to succeed.

Squirtle

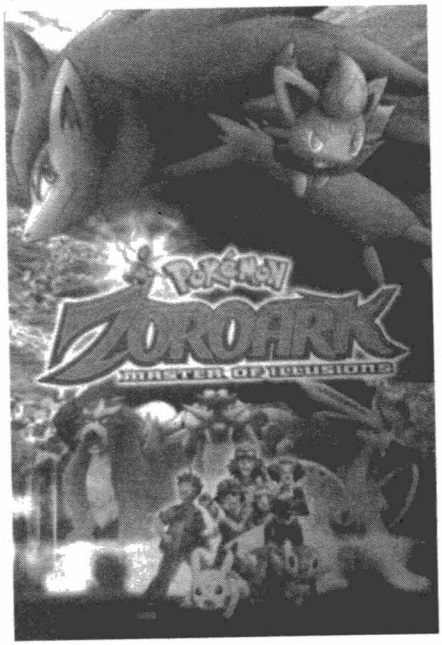


With no option to slap a pair of shades on Squirtle to have him mimic the Anime's clearly amazing Squirtle Squad, there's basically no point to choosing him. Well, that's not entirely fair – Water monsters are in short supply until you get the better fishing rods, plus Blastoise is a decent defensive bet. His opening falls somewhere between the other two in terms of challenge though later on, Surge and Erika won't treat the poor little shelled fellow well.

Pokémon Movie Reviews

Zoroark Master of Illusions

We might have only got up to the tenth Pokémon movie – *The Rise of Darkai* – on DVD in the UK, but Pokémon movie making stops for no-one and this is the 13th full-length Pokémon movie, seen in Japanese cinemas and on DVD in the USA. *Ruler of Illusions: Zoroark* has been renamed *Zoroark Master of Illusions* and is one exciting flick. We've seen all the trailers and enjoyed the new Pokémon in action...



Ash Ketchum is once again wandering around the Pokémon-filled wilderness on his way to some battle or other when he and his mates Brock and Dawn decide to call in on Crown City where the Pokémon Backer World Cup is

taking place. Crown City is a beautiful place to visit with lots of green spaces and architecture, but all of that is soon spoiled...

Ash is intrigued by a creature that he has never seen before as he explores the city. It turns out it's called Zorua, a type of baby fox. The poor Pokémon is upset as it has lost its friend. Of course, before too long Ash has offered his services to find the lost friend.

Just as Ash and his chums are setting to work to find Zorua's mate, all hell breaks loose in Crown City! After a 20-year absence from the place, the Legendary Pokémon Celebi returns with no warning. As if that wasn't strange enough, an entirely new menace rears its ugly head – the evolution of Zorua is called Zoroark and can transform itself into any Pokémon it wishes!

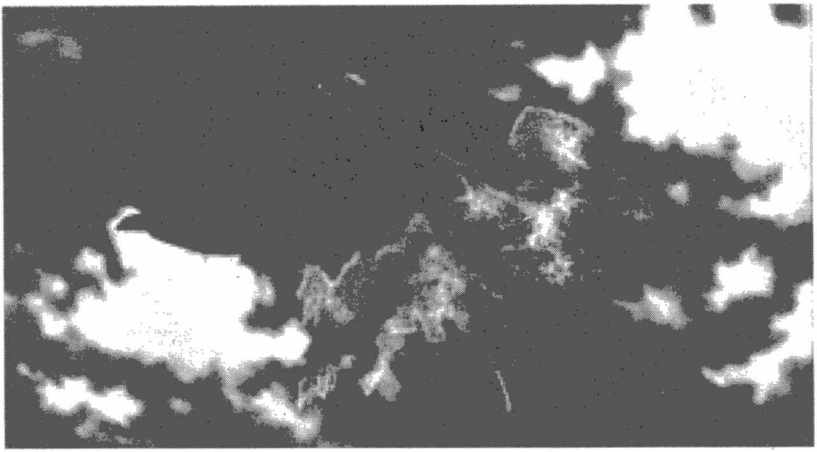
Terrorising the citizens of Crown City, and of course making Ash, Brock and Dawn feel a bit sick too, Zoroark transforms into Raikou, Suicune and Entei. As if that

wasn't terrifying enough, the evil fox then goes on to create an evil version of Ash himself!

Luckily, Ash and his mates are not alone in solving the problems of Crown City as a guy called Kurt turns up. He is a newspaper reporter and wears a similar cap to Ash, only with a bat symbol on it! Is seems that time travel might have something to do with the plot of the movie, with Celebi travelling back in time to stop a future problem with the Legendary Beasts!

The movie gets even more mysterious with the arrival of an airship and some evil cackling blokes! What on earth could be going on?

One thing's for sure – Zoroark is not going to be a pushover for Ash to sort out. This evil fox means business, and those teeth look nasty!



The Many Transformations of Zoroark...

The new Pokémon Zoroark has the ability to transform into any living creature and cause havoc! As Ash, Brock and Dawn look on in horror, they witness the evil fox transform into three Legendary Beast Pokémon before having a go at becoming Ash! Then the strange creature returns to its normal form...

It's Evil Ash!

When Zoroark starts to terrorise Crown City by transforming into Legendary Pokémon, there is one extra trick the evil fox Pokémon has up its hairy sleeve – it transforms into an evil version of Ash! How will the citizens of Crown City be able to tell the real Ash, who is out to help them, from the evil version? This movie could get very confusing! Of course, they could always just look out for the Ash who has an evil grin and then avoid him!

Human Stars of the 13th Pokémon Movie...

It's been 13 years since *Pokémon the First Movie: Mewtwo Strikes Back* hit cinemas for its Japanese debut.

And now, 13 films on, Ash Ketchum is still on his never-ending quest for Pokémon battling supremacy, and he has his trusty chums with him for the ride. Take a look at who is starring this time...

Ash Ketchum

Wherever there is Pokémon trouble, he is always there! With Pikachu not far behind. Will Ash ever complete his journey, we wonder?

Brock

Just like we wonder whether Brock will ever open his eyes! Brock has his Croagunk with him to keep him away from the ladies.

Dawn

Ahh, the lovely Dawn. She carries her little Piplup with her for comfort, and also keeps the boys in check!

Kodai

The arch-villain of the movie, he's the president of the

large Kodai Network company and not someone to be messed around!

Kurt

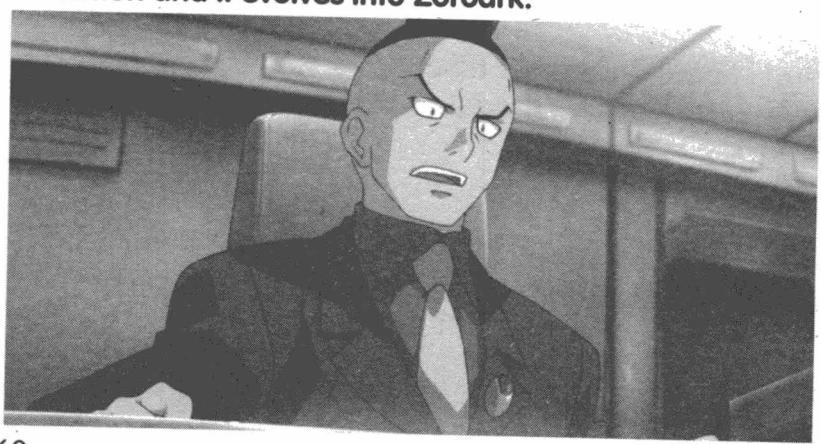
This chap is a newspaper reporter from Crown City and he always has a camera ready to snap away. He wants to discover the secret of Kodai.

Rioka

She is the secretary to Kodai. She is always cool under pressure and makes sure Kodai has plenty of hot tea and biscuits!

The Two New Evil Foxes...

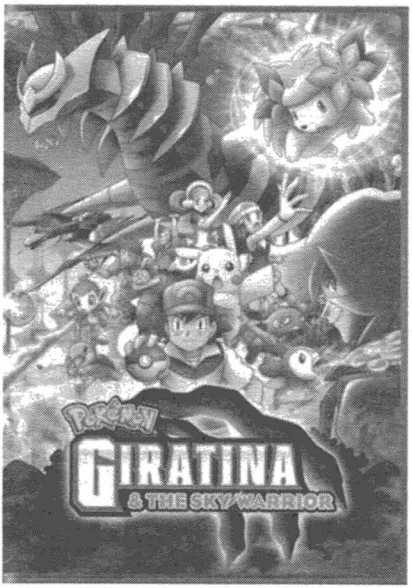
And there we were thinking that 493 Pokémon were quite enough to keep us all busy when The Pokémon Company goes and invents two more! These two are the first of the fifth generation of Pokémon that will star in the 13th Pokémon movie, and the new videogames out now. When the movie came out we knew next to nothing about them, except that Zorua is the basic Forme of the Pokémon and it evolves into Zoroark.



Giratina and the Sky Warrior

A man hell-bent on controlling the Reverse World, no matter what the consequences. A Pokémon really angry and ready for a fight, and Ash and his pals caught up in the middle. It's another great Pokémon movie!

The 11th Pokémon movie has never made it out on DVD in the UK, but we picked up a copy from Amazon, where you can buy the American version, as long as you have a multi-region DVD player to play it on. So, sit back and enjoy the movie with Pokémon World...



Little Shaymin is quietly enjoying a sip of water when it witnesses Dialga being sucked into the Reverse World by a giant Giratina. The force picks up Shaymin and takes the little Pokémon through the vortex into the Reverse World too, and it barely hangs on to Giratina while the new Legendary Pokémon battle. All of this is observed by a guy called Zero from the

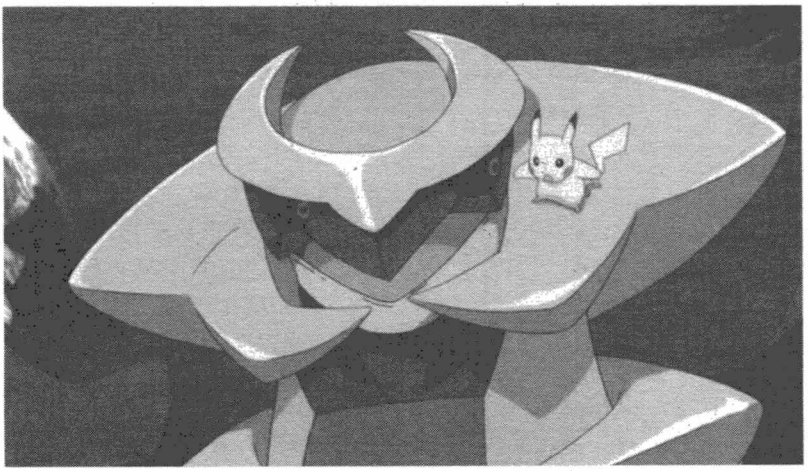
safety of a hovering spaceship. Shaymin doesn't like the look of this new place and, using a Seed Flare move, the Pokémon tears a hole in the Reverse World and escapes back to the real world. Dialga attacks Giratina with a laser, trapping the Pokémon in a time loop and allowing Dialga to escape too.

Meanwhile, in a small seaside town, Ash and his friends Dawn and Brock and sitting down to lunch when they spy a little Shaymin who appears to be ill. They quickly rush it off to the nearest Pokémon Center and once recovered, Shaymin talks to them telepathically.

Shaymin wants to return to its flower field home where it can lead a simple life, but just as the team are listening intently, Team Rocket barge in and capture the Gratitude Pokémon. At that same moment, a mirror portal into the Reverse World opens up and sucks Shaymin, Team Rocket and then Ash and his friends in, but strangely leaves Brock behind!

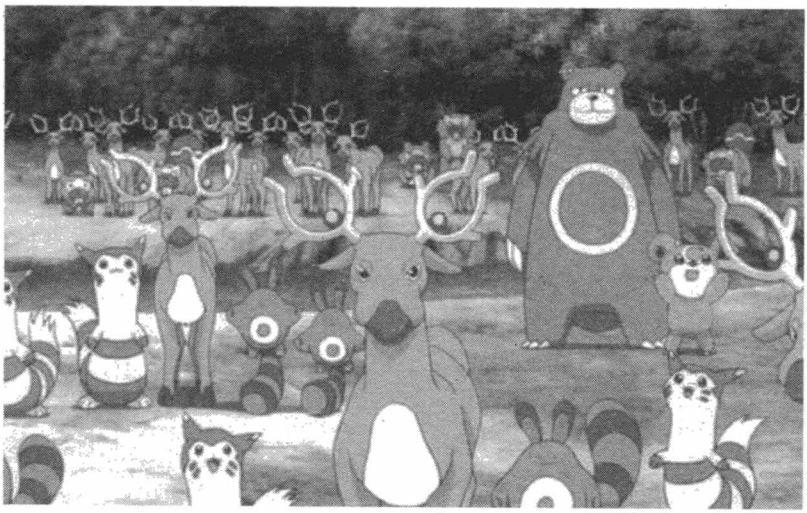
Down in the Reverse World, Ash and Dawn meet Newton Graceland, a scientist who has been studying the Pokémon in this alternate world and who witnessed the battle between Giratina and Dialga. Newton used to have an assistant to help him in his studies – he was called Zero... Newton helps Ash and his party to escape before the Reverse World is filled with a toxic, purple smoke from the Legendary Pokémon battle. The smoke just serves to infuriate Giratina more, and while Ash and Dawn get out in time, Team Rocket get stuck behind with Newton!

Out of the frying pan and into the fire, as they say. When they get back to the real world, Ash and his friends are attacked by Zero from his ship. He sends out wave after wave of Magnemite, Megnezone and Megneton Pokémon, and the heroes have to fend off the attacks while looking for an escape route. They quickly board a passing train to make a getaway. On board the train, Shaymin goes exploring and discovers some Gracidea



flowers; these blooms cause the Pokémon to transform into a Sky Forme Shaymin.

Just as Ash thinks he can relax, Zero's Pokémon invade the train too! The team of heroes and Pokémon have to get off the train, and it's not long before we see them on board a boat instead. The boat is en route to Shaymin's home when a giant portal opens up in the water, sucking everyone in this time, including Brock and Zero! Shaymin, in its Sky Forme, thinks it's time to do battle with the pesky Giratina itself, but it's not long before the Sky Forme wears off and Shaymin is back to its cuddly Land Forme. Ash, Dawn and Brock manage to bump into Newton again, and he helps them hide from the Pokémon battles going on around them. Zero appears and reveals to them all that he has plans to rule the Reverse World. Zero then forces Shaymin to use its Seed Flare again to rip a hole and allow return passage to the real world.



Giratina takes the opportunity of a hole into the real world to smash through the time loop and escape, only to be caught by Zero. Everyone is dismayed when Newton explains that if Zero carries out his plan to rule the Reverse World, it will surely kill off Giratina for good. Not wanting any Pokémon to end its days this way, Ash and the troupe, along with Shaymin back in its Sky Forme, head for Zero's spaceship to put a stop to his plans. Newton knows the technology that Zero is using and sets about deactivating Zero's device. Dawn and Ash use the Pokémon battling skills to fend off another Megnemite, Megnezone and Megneton invasion. Eventually Newton manages to release Giratina, but the ship is on a crash course!

Giratina escapes from the ship in time, only to plop into the water exhausted. Shaymin restores the mighty Pokémon's powers by transferring its own, while Zero is still causing trouble by using Giratina's former powers

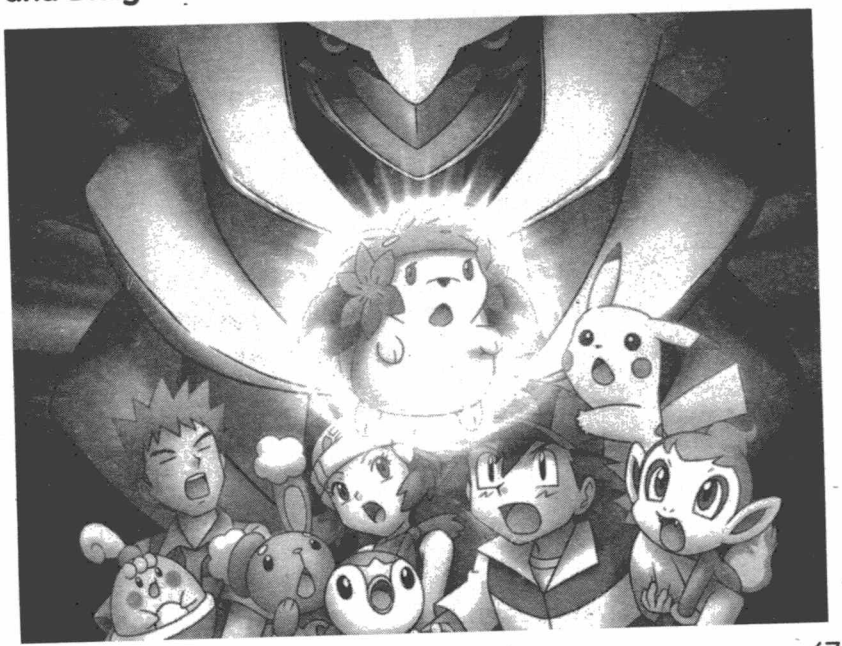
from the Reverse World! Zero's actions awaken a new danger, though – Regigigas comes to the rescue of Ash and his team as they struggle with an unstable glacier. Then they all set about stopping Zero for good.

Will the team manage to put a stop to Zero's dastardly plans, and will Shaymin get to migrate with its Pokémon family? Only watching the full DVD will answer those questions – it's well worth seeking out.

Who's Who in the Movie...

While the movie stars all the regular Pokémon characters like Ash, Dawn and Brock, there are some new faces in Giratina & The Sky Warrior that you won't have come across before. First up is Zero! This guy, dressed in his spacesuit, is an old pupil of scientist Newton Graceland, and he has now turned evil and has set out to rule the Reverse World, relentlessly chasing Giratina to make this come true. The problem is that his plans risk the destruction of the real world! Newton is a bit of an

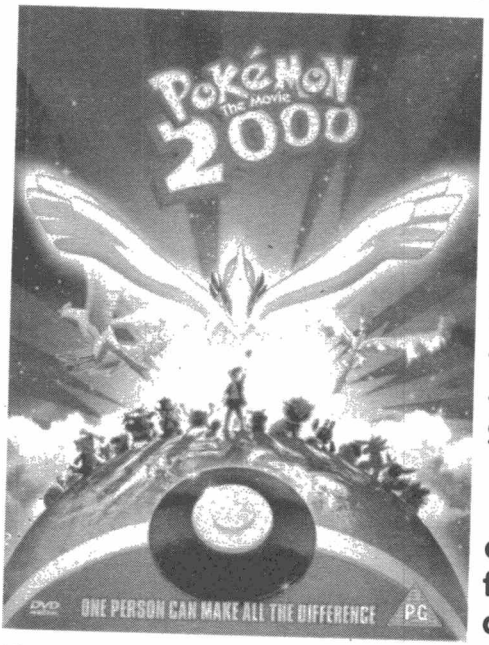
eccentric chap who guides Ash and his pals when they enter the Reverse World themselves. He is accompanied by his Shieldon Pokémon, and Newton knows the importance of the relationship between the Reverse World and our own world. The lovely young lady is called Infi, but this is no ordinary woman – Infi is in fact the artificial intelligence inside Zero's computer, on board his ship. That explains the strange sci-fi clothing then! Of course, the Pokémon that is the main star of the movie is not new to regular Pokémon World readers, but this movie did mark the revealing of just how powerful this Pokémon was, and explained a lot about the Reverse (or Distortion) World where Giratina comes from. Both the Origin and Altered Forme of Giratina make an appearance in the movie – Giratina is angry at Palkia and Dialga.



Pokémon The Movie 2000

There's a festival taking place on the Orange Islands to celebrate the legend of the 'Great Guardian' Pokémon Lugia, and the delicate balance of power between the Legendary birds Articuno, Zapdos and Moltres. Then Ash arrives...

Legend has it that should the balance of power between the three bird Pokémon be destroyed then chaos will come to the forces of nature. The only way that calm will be restored is by the appearance of the 'Great Guardian' Pokémon Lugia who will rise from the depths of the ocean to end the destruction of the world with help from 'The Chosen One'.

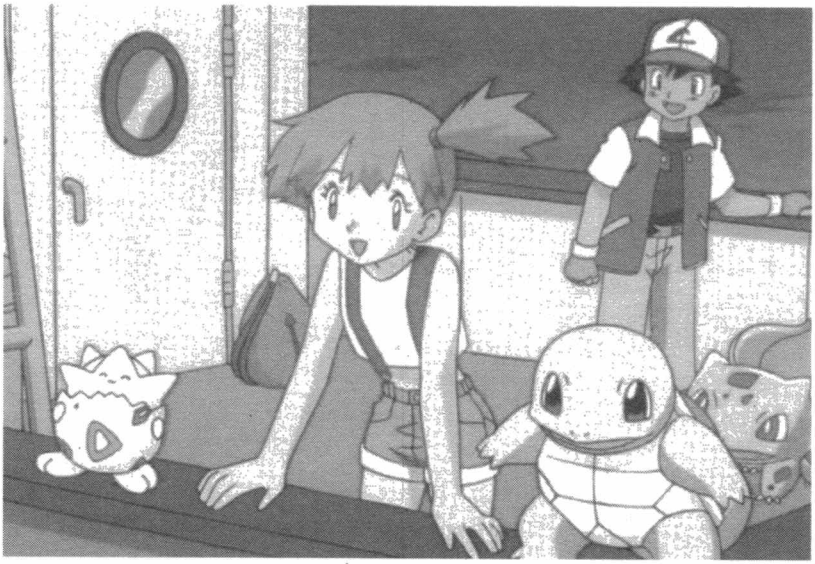


Enter Pokémon collector Lawrence III, who knows the legend well. His ambition is to capture Articuno, Zapdos and Moltres, hoping that they will lead him to the ultimate prize – 'The Beast of the Sea', Lugia.

Lawrence III rides on a giant flying fortress and sets about making his

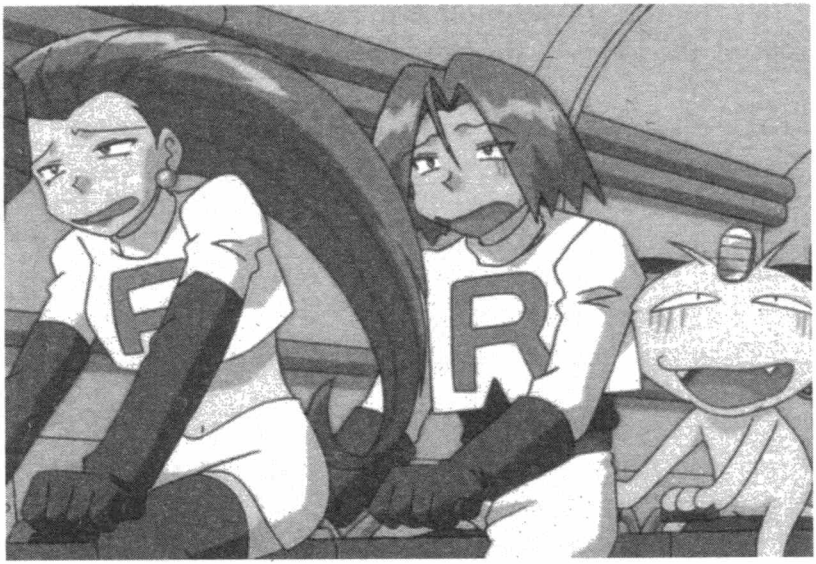
wishes come true by capturing Moltres from Fire Island. True to the legend, the world's climate starts to change for the worse with heavy rain beginning to fall in the middle of summer. This alerts many of the Pokémon and humans around the world, including none other than Professor Oak himself. He sets off with Professor Ivy and Ash's mum, Delia Ketchum, to the Orange Islands using his helicopter.

The freak storm catches Ash, Misty, Tracey and the captain of their boat, Maren, off guard and they head for the shelter of Shamuti Island. They dock and are freaked out by the appearance of chanting villagers in animal costumes. It's okay though, Maren recognises her friend Carol among them, and it turns out that there is a festival taking place, and being the first Pokémon Trainer to arrive on the island during the festival, Ash is declared 'The Chosen One'.



Ash's mission is to travel to the bird's islands and collect three glass balls representing the elements, then bring them back to the island shrine where the Festival Maiden will play a song to end the task. Ash is eager to get started, but Pikachu is a bit more cautious.

Back out at sea with a fresh storm raging, Ash and Pikachu soon crash onto Fire Island and easily pick up the first glass ball. An aerodynamic boat turns up carrying Misty, Tracey and the Festival Maiden Melody, who feels guity for sending Ash off in such terrible weather. Before they can say too much, Zapdos appears and has a word with Pikachu through lightning communication. Team Rocket have caught up with Ash, but they are the least of his worries – Lawrence III appears and captures Zapdos along with Ash, his gang and Team Rocket, too!



Inside the flying fortress, Ash manages to free Zapdos and Moltres and the two Legendary birds start fighting. This causes havoc and the flying fortress is soon out of control, crashing into Lightning Island. As the gang all rush to escape, Ash takes the opportunity to grab the lightning ball to continue his mission. As they all jump on board Melody's board, a typhoon starts up around them. It turns out to be Lugia and it carries them all the way back to Shamuti Island.

Here Ash meets a Slowking, who turns out to be the guardian of the Shamuti Shrine. When Ash gets over the surprise of the Pokémon talking to him, he gets his instructions of what to do with the glass balls he has collected. Now it's Lugia's turn to have a chat with Ash, and the Pokémon tells him to go to the Ice Island where he will find Articuno's glass ball.

The Legendary Pokémon also reveals that Ash is the actual chosen one that the legends foretold!

Ash's journey to the Ice Island is helped along by Charizard, Squirtle and Bulbasaur who try to help the hero get across a frozen ocean, but all the time the Legendary birds try to stop him in his tracks. Racing through the island's foliage, Ash manages to pick up the Ice ball and a fight ensues between the birds with Articuno knocked unconscious from the sky!

Bizarrely, Ash, Pikachu and Team Rocket escape from the island on the back of Lugia, but the weight is too much, so Team Rocket jump off 'to save the world'. Lawrence III reappears, this time with Lugia in his sights. Lugia hits Lawrence with a massively powerful attack, but is weakened and plummets into the sea, taking Ash and Piakchu with it. Rescued by Misty, Ash and his Pokémon scramble back to shore.

With the final ball placed into the shrine, Melody plays her song and Lugia is rescued from the depths along with the three birds. This rights all the wrongs and the climate returns to normal. Lugia takes Ash and Pikachu for a triumphant ride. Ash is soon brought back down to earth, though – his mum turns up and tells him off for worrying her so much!

The Power of One Facts...

• This is the second Pokémon movie made, and while the title cashes in on the fact it was the year 2000, the true title is The Power Of One.

• In Japan, where their titles are often more literal, the movie is known as Mirage Pokémon: Lugia's Explosive Birth.

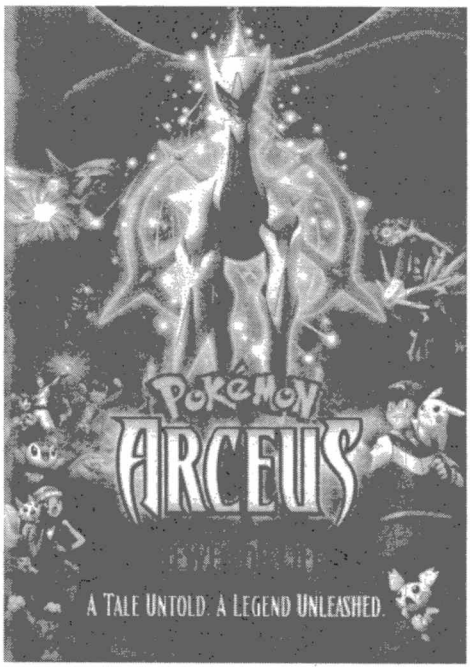
• Brock is the only main Pokémon character that isn't in the main movie, but he makes a cameo appearance in Professor Ivy's lab. This is because Brock was written out of the Orange Islands story for fears that his character might offend people!

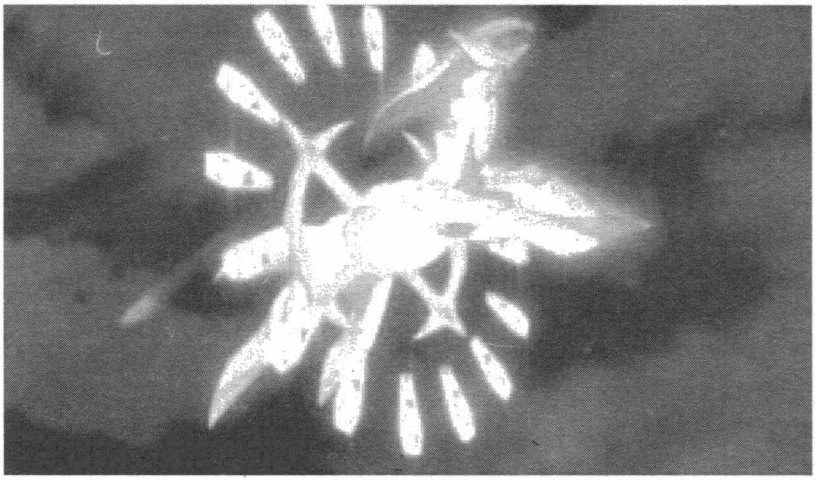
• The Pokémon Slowking, Lugia and Articuno make their debuts.

Pokémon: Arceus and the Jewel of Life

Since we discovered the Legendary Pokémon Dialga, Palkia and Giratina in the Pokémon adventures, the journey has taken us through time and space and into distorted worlds and alternate dimensions. Now he head off to an entirely new arena – the ancient past to help the final Pokémon in the National Pokédex – Arceus.

The town of Michina has existed for a very long time, but unknown to many of today's townsfolk, it has a dark history that involves Arceus – the Legendary Pokémon that is thought to have helped shape the world. Many, many years ago Michina was a town in need of help. Arceus came to the town's rescue and granted it a portion of its own power in the form of the Jewel of Life. When it came to giving the Jewel back to Arceus though, the town





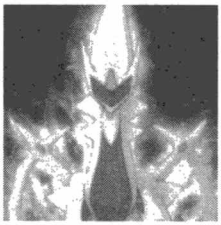
betrayed the Pokémon and attacked it, sending it into a deep sleep.

The leaders of Michina know that they must make amends with Arceus for their ancestor's mistakes, and as the Pokémon is set to return soon, they make plans to appease the Legendary monster. Arceus's return causes ripples in the Space-TIme continuum which affect Dialga, Palkia and Giratina, and it's not long before the plans of the people of Michina start to go wrong, enraging Arceus even more and threatening all of existence!

Meanwhile, Ash, Dawn and Brock arrive and promise to help their new friend Sheena in her quest to solve Michina's problem. They have one chance of putting everything right, and it involves using Dialga's time traveling powers to go back in time and confront the people who betrayed Arceus in the first place. When they arrive there they soon realise that the truth

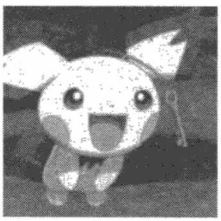
doesn't match the history books, but can they fix history before there's no world left to worry about?

Get To Know the... Pokémon



Arceus

Many Pokémon experts believe that Arceus helped to shape the world, and this Pokémon certainly helped to restore the town of Michina when it created the Jewel of Life. It was betrayed by the townspeople though, and fell into a very deep sleep. It is now set to return for revenge, and could threaten the fabric of time and space!



Spiky-eared Pichu

This little Pokémon loves to help people in trouble. It lives in the Michina temple, and wanders around wherever it pleases, being perky and cheering people up. It has distinctive spiky ears, setting it apart from a regular Pichu.

Dialga, Palkia & Giratina

The return of Arceus to the real world has caused a conflict between the worlds of Dialga and Palkia. It wasn't long before Giratina was drawn into the battle too. Now it might be that the only way to resolve this colossal problem is to use Dialga's time travel abilities!

Get to Know the... People

Damos

Many years ago, this guy saved Arceus's life, and in return he was granted the Jewel of Life to help him save the ravaged land of Michina. When it came to returning the Jewel of Life though, instead of handing it over to the Legendary Pokémon he attacked it!

Marcus

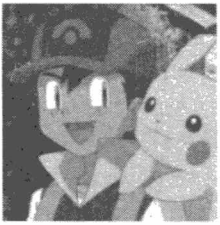
He is the assistant to Damos, and has his own team of strong Pokémon at his command, including a battle-ready Heatran and Bronzong. He will do anything to protect the land of Michina in the hope of seeing it continue to flourish.

Sheena

She's a smart girl. She knows that her ancestors did Arceus a great wrong and she wants to see the Jewel of Life returned to the Pokémon. She has the power to touch Pokémon's hearts and ask them for help, and she works to protect the ancient ruins of Michina.

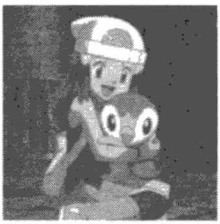
Kevin

He is Sheena's partner and helps her to guard the ruins of Michina, keeping a sharp eye on the Time-Space Axis, looking for disturbances between the various worlds.



Ash

We all know Ash, the brash young Trainer from Pallet Town with his trusty Pikachu by his side. His aim is to be the best Pokémon battler around, and his record proves this! He has a knack for befriending Pokémon, which is useful when it comes to dealing with situations like this one with Arceus.



Dawn

Just like her mother before her, Dawn wants to be the top Pokémon Co-ordinator around. She has a Piplup she takes everywhere with her and has had lots of adventures with her friend Ash. The best time she has had is with Shaymin.

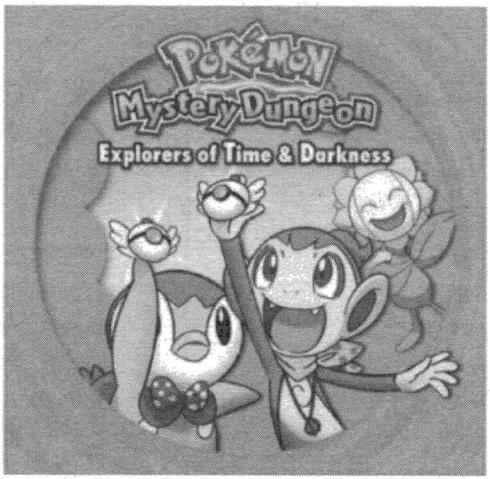
Brock

He's the former leader of the Pewter City Pokémon Gym, he has been by Ash's side through many adventures since the Kanto days. He loves being around pretty girls and that draws him to Sheena when she needs help in the movie.

Pokémon Mystery Dungeon: Explorers of Time & Darkness DVD

If you were hanging around your local Woolworths back in the summer of 2008 you might have picked up a Ltd Ed DVD of *Mystery Dungeon Explorers Of Time & Darkness* in a goodie bag at the Pokémon Live event. If not, this is what you missed...

The DVD is a special episode of the Pokémon anime based on the new DS games of the same name. Nintendo and Pokémon Company have certainly been getting their money's worth from it – it was first broadcast in Japan on 9 September 2007 as part of a special Pokémon Sunday, and then streamed online. It was also part of a special Limited Edition Onyx DS pack in the States released on 17 August 2008, given away at the Woolworths events and then aired on Cartoon Network on 1 September 2008 as part of a *Diamond & Pearl: Battle Dimension* marathon!

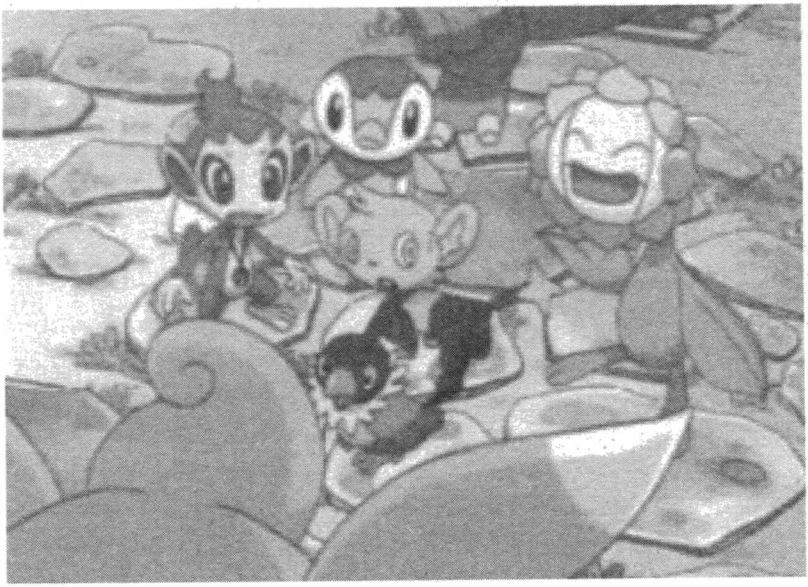


The story begins with Grovyle stealing the Time Gear, which makes time completely freeze! We then see Chimchar trying to put together an Exploration Team at the Wigglytuff Guild until he is scared away by a booming Hyper Voice from the guild. On arriving at the beach, Chimchar bumps in to a Piplup who claims to be a human who has turned into a Pokémon! Chimchar persuades Piplup to join his Exploration Team so that they can find out what has happened to him together. They set off for the Wigglytuff Guild again.

On entering the guild, the duo cause a bit of a stir as they are mistaken for intruders, but things soon settle down and Chatot, Wigglytuff's trusty assistant, explains a series of strange goings on around the world – it appears it's all down to the Time Gear

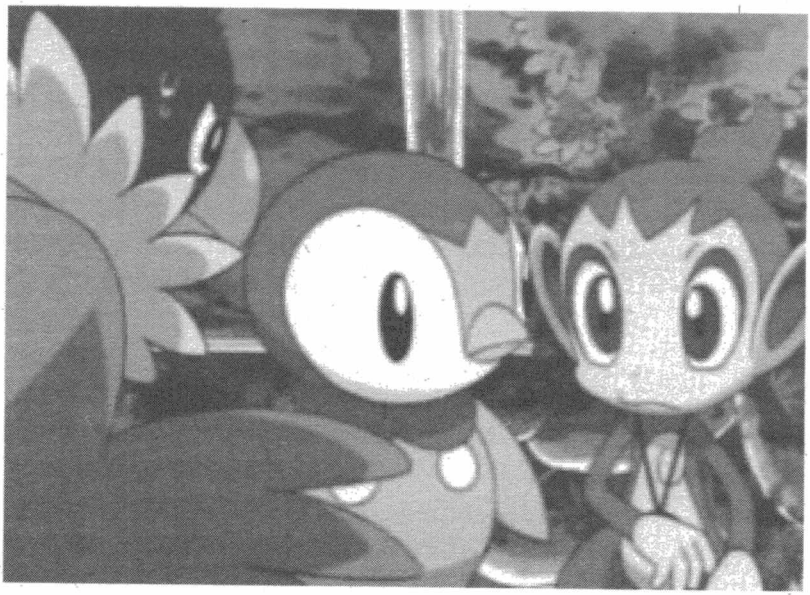
being stolen! Our exploring duo then receive an Exploration Team Start Kit and some Rescue Team badges as their new team, Team Poképals, is officially accepted into the guild.

After spending a restless night at the Wigglytuff Guild, Chimchar and Piplup receive their first rescue mission. They have to travel to the Labyrinth Cave and find a Gabite Scale so that the sister of Shinx can be cured of her sickness. They need a third member for their team, though, and they are joined by a veteran member of the Guild – Sunflora. Before setting off, they know they must stock up on items that they'll need, so they visit Kecleon's shop and buy a Joy Ribbon, Defense Scarf and Power Band. It's not long before these brave Pokémon are entering Labyrinth Cave and things starts to go wrong, big time! They



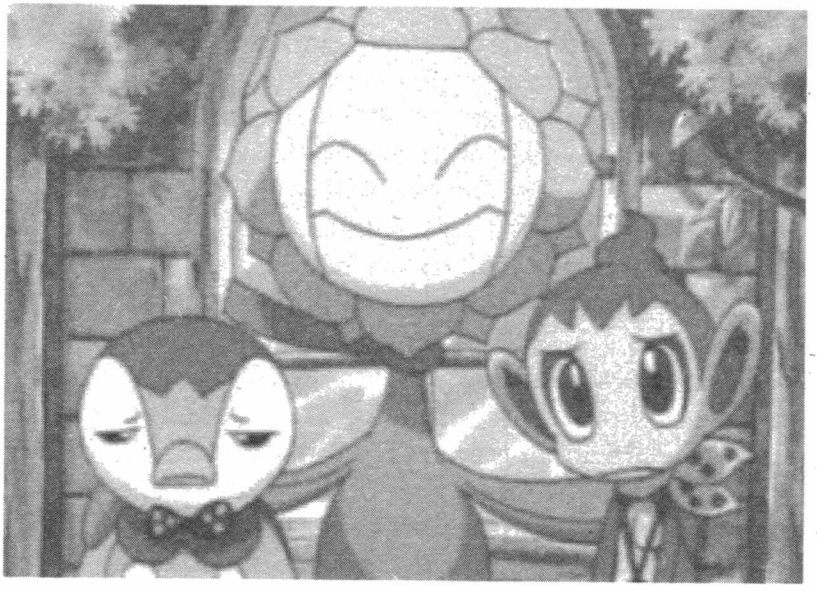
are being followed by Team Razor Wind who thinks that Team Poképals is far too inexperienced for such an important mission and decide to go after the Gabite Scale themselves. Chimchar is scared to pieces when it is attacked by a Golbat swarm not far into the cave. Sunflora attacks the Golbats with her Razor Leaf move and explains how useful the items are to Chimchar and Piplup, who obviously don't know what they're doing. The Defense Scarf saved Chimchar from being injured and the Power Band made the Razor Leaf attack stronger than usual.

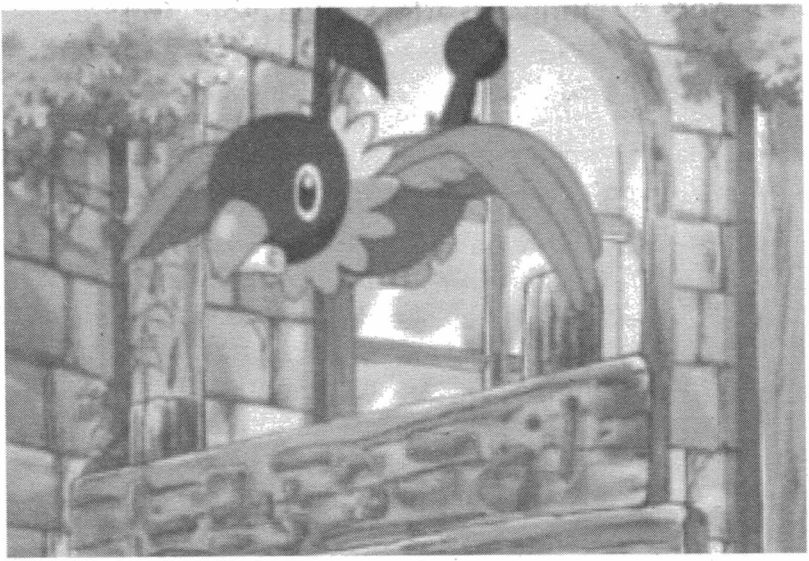
Continuing on into the cave, it's not long before Piplup teeters on the edge of a pit, but is saved by Chimchar grabbing his hand. It appears that Piplup has visions of the future, and one of these shows a bridge collapsing, so when Chimchar comes to



a bridge and wants to immediately cross, Piplup stops him in his tracks. Good thing too, because sure enough, the bridge collapses right in front of their eyes!

It's not long before the exploring trio stumble upon a bruised and battered Team Razor Wind. They explain that when they tried to take the Gabite Scale from Gabite, he challenged them to a battle and they lost. This could be Team Poképal's chance to shine, so they find Gabite and Piplup decides to take him on in battle for the Scale. Kicking off with a Sand Tomb move, Gabite is a formidable opponent for the team. Chimchar retaliates with Ember, but this fails to make an impression on Gabite. Piplup uses his Bubble move, but Gabite's Dragon Claw knocks both Pokémon to the floor and leaves them stunned.





Sunflora doesn't stand for this and uses Razor Leaf again, which is strengthened by the Power Band. She then tries to follow up with a Petal Dance, but Gabite retaliates with an Attract move and leaves her unable to fight at all! Piplup is furious and uses Peck on Gabite, but Gabite only laughs at the pathetic power of the Pokémon! With both friends down, Chimchar goes crazy with Fury Swipes. While the massive Gabite is dealing with this, Piplup comes back into the fight with what it thinks is Bubble, but it's not, it's BubbleBeam, as Piplup has increased experience by using the Joy Ribbon. Another BubbleBeam move later and Gabite has been knocked out by the Pokémon that he was laughing at only moments ago! As Team Poképals recovers from its ordeal, Gabite starts to come around – oh no! The three Pokémon are weak and can't possibly manage another battle with the giant Pokémon again so soon! Just as

they were preparing to attack once more, Gabite stops them and tells them not to worry. He has had an enjoyable battle with them and presents them with one of his scales as a reward. Hooray! Team Poképals first mission has been completed! They head back to the Wigglytuff Guild and hand over the booty. Shinx is over the moon that his sister can now get better and gives the team a Luxray Fang as a reward for their bravery. Before they can enjoy their winnings, though, Chatot whips the prize away and informs them that it's Wigglytuff Guild rules that all rewards go to the Guild. As you can imagine, the two Poképals are not very happy with this, but they don't have much time to argue about it before Loudred, another member of the Wigglytuff Guild, charges into the room and informs everyone that another Time Gear has been stolen by Grovyle.

With a successful mission under their belt, Chimchar and Piplup start talking and Piplup says that he would like to stay on Team Poképals if that's okay with Chimchar. The Pokémon hopes to find out more about what has happened to him, and calls Chimchar his partner. The two Pokémon shake hands and Chimchar is excited about the adventures the two of them will have together.

Will Piplup ever find out how he turned from a human into a Pokémon? Will Team PokéPals complete all their given missions and become heroes of the Wigglytuff Guild? Well, you will just have to watch more Pokémon to find out!

Special DVD Facts!

- The animation team behind this is called Team Ota. The last feature the team worked on was an episode of the Pokémon anime called 'All That Glitters Is Not Golden'.
- The music in this DVD is mostly taken from the videogame score, giving both Pokémon products a kind of synergy! It was composed by Arata Iiyoshi.
- Continuing the mystery theme, this special episode of the anime ends with 'To be continued...' but we don't yet know whether further Mystery Dungeon specials will be released on DVD.

Characters in this DVD...

There are a whole host of Pokémon starring in this *Mystery Dungeon Explorers of Time & Darkness* DVD. Just check this lot out...

Team Poképals – Piplup, Chimchar

Wigglytuff Guild – Wigglytuff, Chatot, Corphish, Diglett, Loudred, Bidoof, Chimecho, Croagunk, Dugtrio, Sunflora

Team Razor Wind – Zangoose, Scyther, Sandslash

Treasure Town – Shinx, Kecleon, Duskull, Gabite

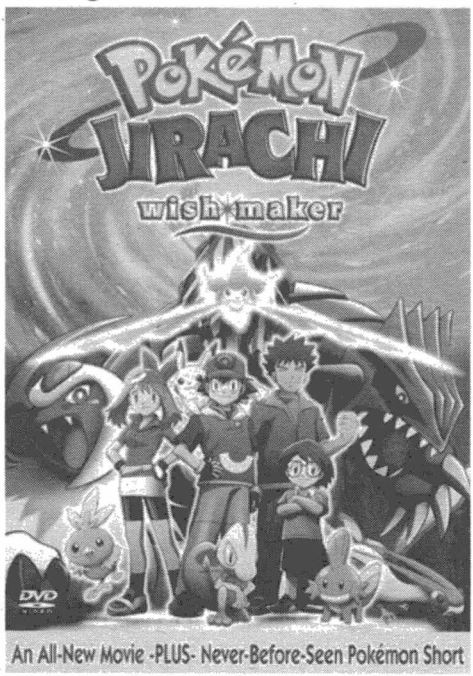
Thieves – Grovyle, Drowzee, Sharpedo, Weavile, Gyarados

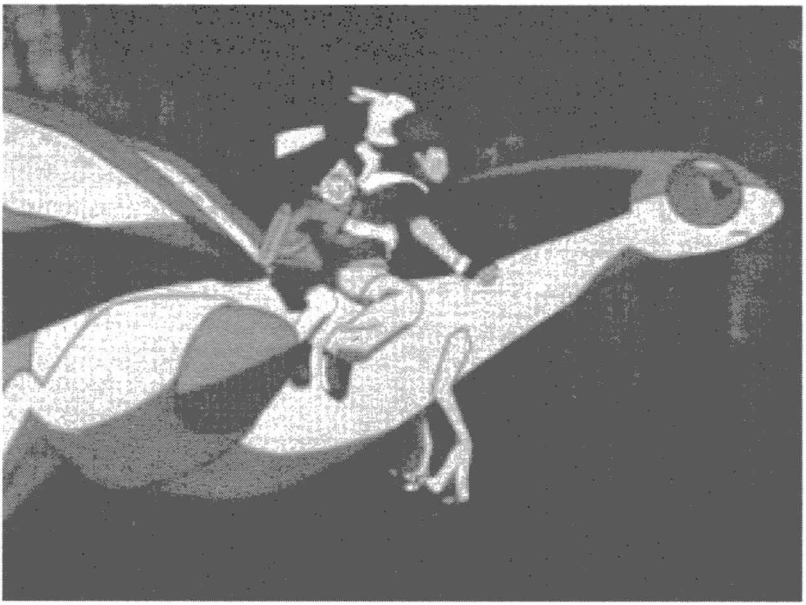
Others – Golbat. Gabite actually makes its movie and DVD debut in this action-packed adventure!

Jirachi Wish Maker

The Pokémon-loving gang have wound up at a carnival to celebrate the arrival of the Millennium Comet. However, it's not long before there's some Pokémon action at the carnival itself, too! Will Ash step in and save the day when a monster goes on the rampage, or will they need help of the mysterious Jirachi? Read on to find out...

We rejoin Ash and his travelling gang at the start of his Advanced Generation adventures. This time they are visiting a carnival that has been arranged to celebrate the appearance of the Millennium Comet. This comet appears in the night sky for seven days once every thousand years. The Pokémon Trainers are soon making friends with a Jirachi – a Pokémon that only wakes up when the Millennium Comet is around so that it can absorb its energy. It's not long before Max has become firm friends with the Jirachi after hearing

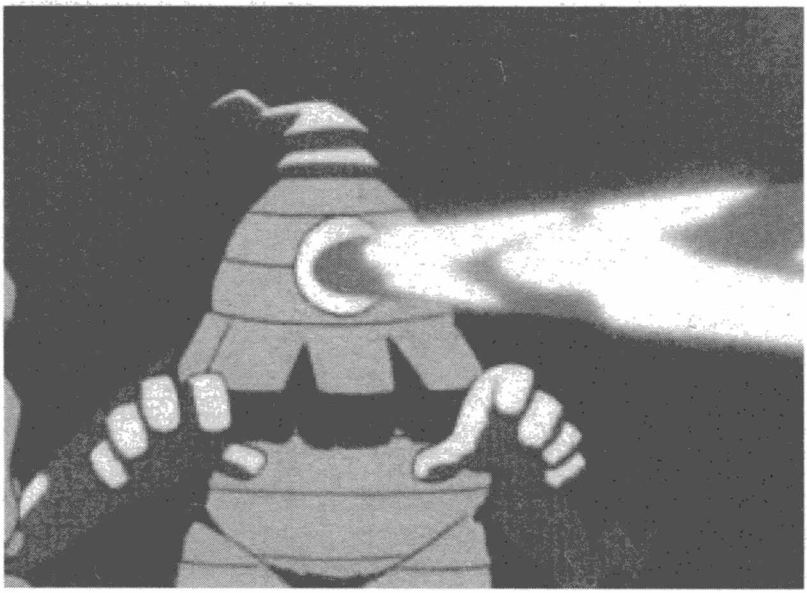




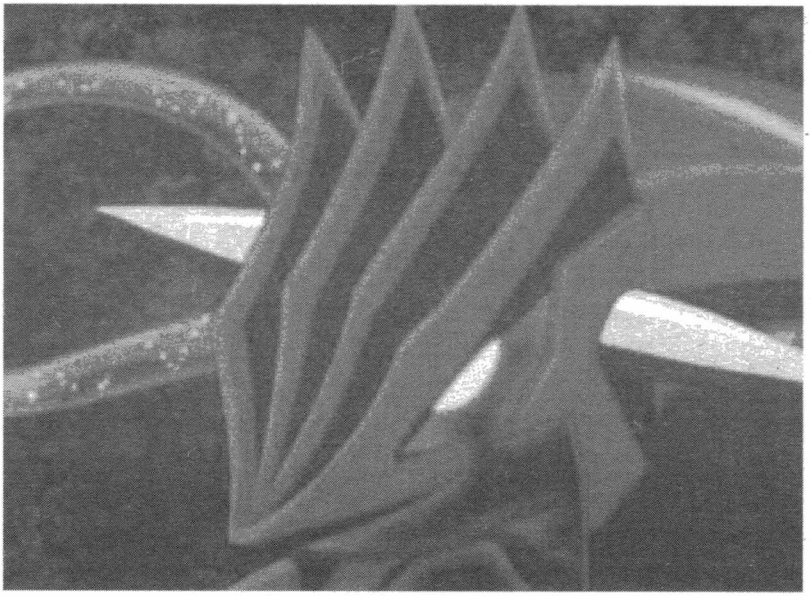
it talking from inside a rock at a carnival magic show. He knows that Jirachi will grant wishes so Max wishes for lots and lots of sweets! Suddenly he is surrounded by sweets of all kinds! But there are others about who have their eyes on the mysterious Pokémon.

He may look like a regular carnival magician, but the guy in the snazzy clothes is actually an ex-Team Magma scientist called Butler. He has a plan to use Jirachi's power from the comet to bring forth Groudon and then use this Ground-type Pokémon to get his revenge on Team Magma!

Ash and his team know that something serious is going down when an Absol appears, as this Pokémon is known to only turn up when a disaster is close! Absol leads the Trainers, along with Jirachi, to Forina to be



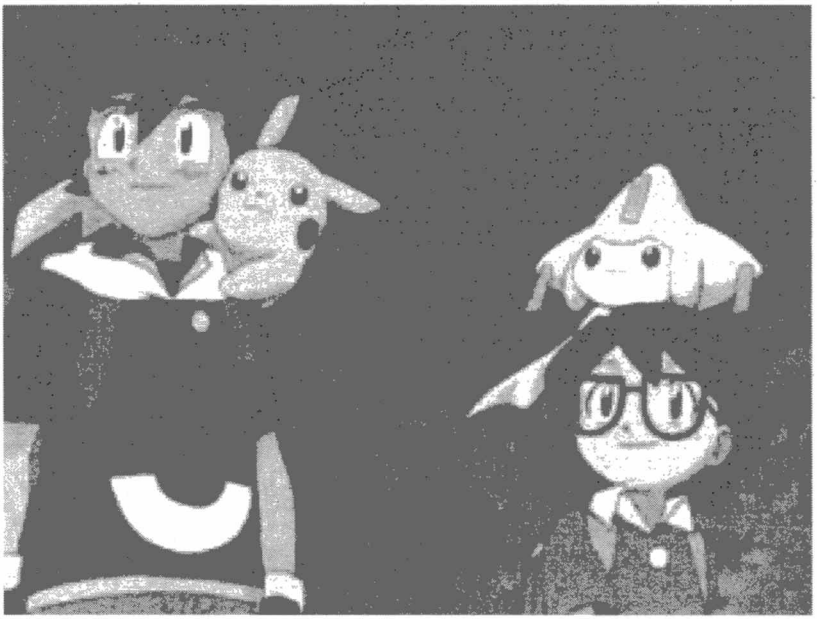
safe. Forina is a place that grows up from the energy Jirachi places into the Earth. Unfortunately though, Butler is one step ahead of them and sets a trap to get his hands on Jirachi! Butler does his magic spell, but it fails to bring out a true Groudon and instead a crazed Groudon-like monster is created, hungry for power, and it rampages around, scaring everyone! This mad monster absorbs all the Pokémon around it, leaving a trail of destruction in its wake. It doesn't stop there, though, and it's not long before the crazed monster has captured Brock, May and Diane – Butler's assistant in his magic show and the love of his life! Suddenly Butler realises just what he has done in creating this Groudon beast – he has endangered his girlfriend! Butler does everything he can think of to stop the monster, reversing the spell, but as he tries he is captured himself! Now what?



Jirachi realises that its powers are needed and halts the monster by absorbing all the energy from it back into itself. The monster is stopped in its tracks. It does the job and all the Pokémon and humans are released as the monster is destroyed. Sadly for Max, the energy absorbed causes Jirachi to transform too and the Pokémon turns into its stone Forme, saying goodbye to Ash, Max and the gang just before it changes. It will take another thousand years before the gang can see Jirachi again... perhaps they should just continue their adventure?

Top Movie Facts

- *Jirachi: Wish Maker* was the first Pokémon Anime movie of the Advanced Generation. It was first shown in Japan on 19 July 2003.
- In Japan this movie is known as *Wishing Star of the*



Seven Nights: Jirachi

• This Pokémon movie was the first one in America to go direct to video, missing out on a cinema release.

• The happenings in the film take place between episodes 'Having a Wailord of a Time' and 'Win, Lose or Drew!'

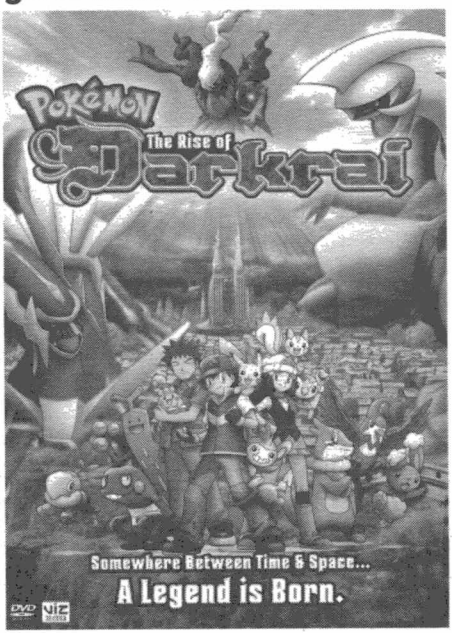
• In *Pokémon Diamond and Pearl*, there are two Ace Trainers on the south of Route 229 that have the same Pokémon as Diane and Butler in this movie. In the Japanese games they had the same name as in the movie, but the English translators obviously failed to see the movie tie-in when they translated the names.

• Strangely, Treecko and Mudkip appear on the DVD box of the movie, but they don't actually appear on screen at all!

The Rise of Darkrai

Our old friend Ash Ketchum has probably seen and battled more Pokémon than most. He has the right to think of himself as a bit of a Pokémon expert, but not even he had come across Darkrai before! Do you think he's ready to face the mysterious Darkrai in the tenth Pokémon movie?

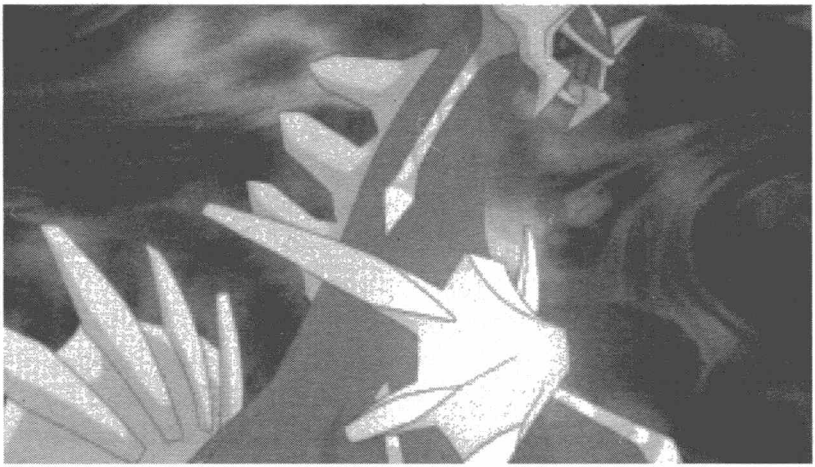
The gang were all on their way to another Pokémon Contest, with Ash leading the way as usual, when they stumble upon a place called Alamos Town. Roaming the streets, they meet a young girl named Alice who kindly gives them a tour of the landmarks of the town – the wonderful gardens filled with water features and lush greenery and the Space-Time Tower. While on their tour they discover that part of the gardens has been destroyed by someone – or something!



Suddenly, a man called Baron Alberto appears. He's an influential man of the

town and he's adamant that this devastation is down to the mysterious Legendary Pokémon Darkrai. Just as he's making these accusations, Darkrai himself appears before them all as if to confront them about Baron's theory! None of the gang had ever come across Darkrai before – just who is he and what does he want? There are so many questions that need to be answered about this Pokémon!

Before anyone can find out we see Dialga and Palkia fighting a vicious battle in space. The ferocious Pokémon are so powerful that they tear a hole in Space-Time and Alamos Town can clearly be seen through it. A deep, dank fog slowly descends on the town, trapping all the townfolk so that they are mysteriously unable to leave! Alice's childhood friend, a boffin called Tonio, soon realises that Alamos Town is in the grips of some kind of Space-Time phenomenon, and analysing the data he discovers that the destruction of the gardens was down to



Palkia arriving in town after suffering terrible injuries in his fight with Dialga. As this giant among Pokémon takes refuge, it's not long before Darkrai senses its presence and goes in for the attack, causing yet more devastation to the poor town and sending the people running for cover. Then, to make matters worse, Dialga appears from the other dimension, looking for his foe to continue the fight. When the two god-like Pokémon meet face to face with Darkrai, the battle between them isn't pretty!

Shockwaves rattle out around the town as the giant Pokémon savage each other. Before too long, the town is nearing complete collapse and a prediction written in the diary of Tonio's great-grandfather and the architect of the Space-Time Tower, Godey, could be coming true! It reads, "When space and time come together, a great wrath will engulf the world. An eternal never-ending battle of gods... a hope is left: Oración..."

Can Ash and his mates save Alamos Town from the wrath of these monstrous Pokémon? Can they trust Darkrai, or is he an enemy? Grab a DVD to find out!

10th Movie Facts!

• The setting of Alamos Town in *The Rise Of Darkrai* is based on Barcelona in Spain. The movie's creators visited the city many times in the making of the anime. The Space-Time tower in the movie and the Oración are actually modelled on the Sagrada Família and the Park Güell in Barcelona, created by architect Antoni Gaudí. The names Tonio and Godey in the movie are a homage to this famous architect and his work.

• *The Rise Of Darkrai*, called *Dialga Vs Palkia Vs Darkrai* in Japan, was a big success in cinemas over there. It topped the box office charts when released and was seen by 1,074,000 people in the first three days!

• The movie was more successful than the previous one, *Pokémon Ranger And The Temple Of The Sea.*

• The English version of the movie was shown exclusively on Cartoon Network in the States on 1 February 2008 andcame out on DVD in the UK on 29 September 2008, courtesy of Network. Grab a copy down the shops as soon as you can! It's only £12.99 and comes with an exclusive limited edition Pokémon Trading Card Game card – cool!

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